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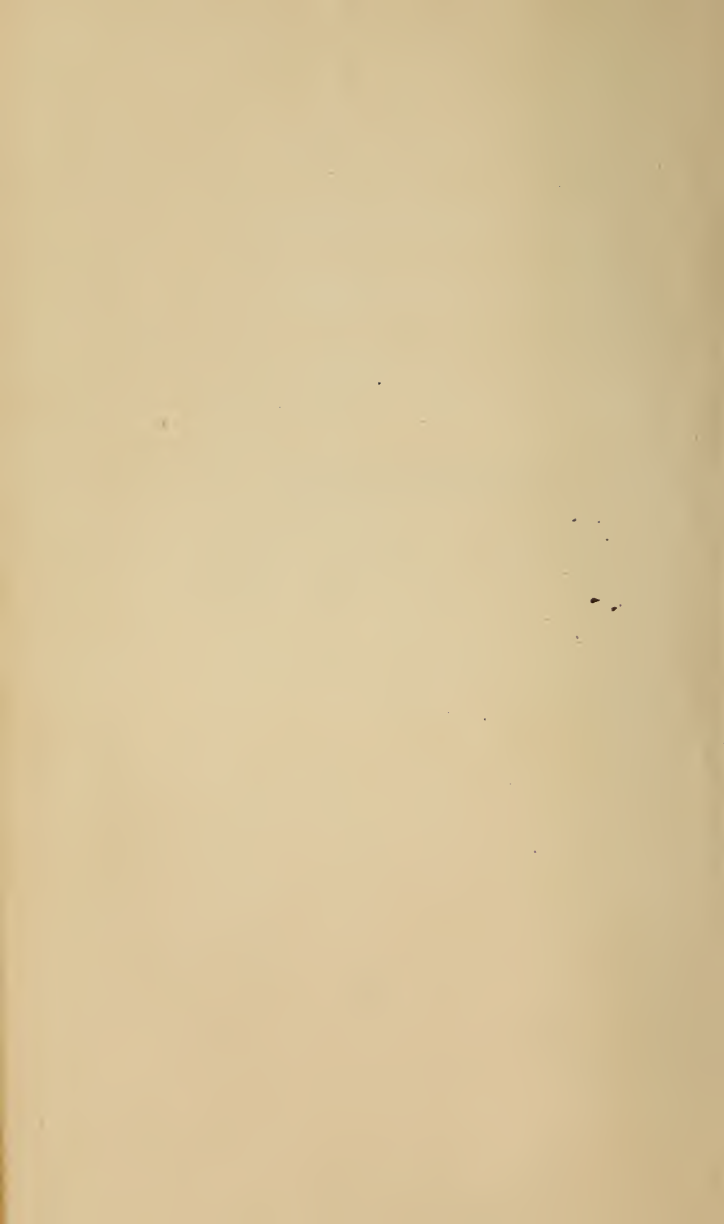






EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.





AN INTRODUCTION  
TO THE EVIDENCES OF  
CHRISTIANITY.

BY J. O. HALLIWELL, ESQ. F.R.S.

SECOND EDITION.

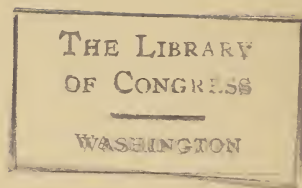


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## PREFACE.

HE first edition of this work was issued, in an expensive form, for private circulation, at the cost of an influential friend, who was of opinion that there was still room for one more essay on the historical Evidences of Christianity. It is now reprinted with many alterations and corrections, and submitted to the public, with the hope that its restriction to the external testimonies in favour of the truth of the religion will render the attempt of some interest to the general reader, by exhibiting the strong evidence of its credibility, even when it is viewed without

any reliance upon the circumstances narrated in its own records.

The essential facts and doctrines of Christianity must, of course, always mainly rest on the statements of its own historical books; but it is hardly necessary to observe that it is a point of some importance to establish the probability of its general truth from extrinsic sources. If the credibility of the religion can be proved in the absence of its best and most trustworthy records,—in short, the history of an era, conducted with a rejection of its chronicles,—the conclusion is irresistible. Adopting this plan, the argument chiefly rests on the testimonies of independent authors, such as Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny, or Celsus, the Epicurean philosopher; not because the works of such writers are really of so much value, or authority, in regard to this subject, as those of the early Christians, but for the reason that there are so many who at once yield to testimonies of

this description, as proceeding from men who were inimical to the religion, and who are, therefore, something more than unbiassed witnesses in respect to what they yield of evidence in its favour.

Works upon the present subject have usually been composed by professed divines, or accomplished controversialists. Writing, however, as a layman, and for the use of laymen, I do not pretend to enter upon any of those intricate questions which are debated amongst critics and theologians; and trust that there is nothing, in the following pages, which can offend the convictions of the members of any denomination of Christians. The absence of temptation to indulge in arguments touching on doctrinal points is, indeed, one of the advantages attending an unprofessional defence of our religion.

*July, 1859.*





## EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

**W**E, the inhabitants of one amidst the many worlds that constitute the universe, are surrounded by mysteries,—by visible and invisible agencies, the discovery of the real natures of which is sought in vain by those gifted with the highest powers of human intelligence. There is not an animal, a bird, a fish, an insect, or, of inanimate substances, a particle of rock, a leaf, or even a drop of water, or a grain of sand, which does not involve, in the history of its creation or composition, inquiries that baffle the researches of the wisest philosophers. In vain do these reduce all theories of life into ultimate facts, and all matter into what they term elementary substances, calling them elements the rather that they are unable to effect

an analysis, than from an absolute knowledge they may not be susceptible of continued divisibility ; for when we arrive at the question of what these elements really are, how they came here, when they were created,—set on one side belief in revelation, and the ablest chemists, or the most subtle geological reasoners, are no better able to give a satisfactory reply than those who are unskilled in all scientific acquirements and learning.

2. Not only are such inquiries as those last mentioned beyond our means of solution, but there seems every reason to believe that the true and minute expositions, if communicated by a higher intelligence,—and there appears to be no other possibility of our obtaining them—would be unintelligible to our minds. The power of our intellects is exceedingly limited. Thus, for example, we are incapable of understanding what must be considered in one sense the simplest problem bearing relation to any inquiry into the history of the universe, or into what is generally termed natural theology. We cannot in the least degree comprehend the nature

of either time or space. We speak of certain arbitrary intervals in our existence by which its progress is measured, but by what possibility there should ever have been a commencement of time, a period before which time did not exist,—or how there should ever be an end of time, a period after which time shall not exist,—is to our minds utterly incomprehensible. We are equally unable to image to ourselves the idea of the infinity of time,—a period so constructed that the lapse of a million years, or a million of million years, would be without any effect on either its relative duration or progress. So also with regard to space, we cannot understand in what manner there can be a point in space at which there is nothing beyond, and we are equally at a loss, if we believe space to be infinite, which means, to use a familiar example, that if a ray of light travelled one hundred and ninety-two thousand miles a second for a million years, at the end of that period, it would neither be further from one side of space, nor nearer to the other. The attributes of infinity are, indeed, entirely in-

comprehensible to the finite human intellect. They must ever be shrouded in mystery to all of us, at least in this life.

3. But although we cannot comprehend the nature of either time or space, whether one or the other be considered as finite or infinite in extent, it seems nearly capable of proof that both must be infinite; for we have the capacity to understand an interval of time, and a distance in space, and it is at once seen that it is impossible the former can exist without time also both preceding and following that interval. So likewise with respect to any distance in space, it is impossible that a limited distance should exist without there being space before its commencement, and space after its termination. Assuming the truth of this position, the question arises, whether any material substance can be coexistent with time and space,—in other words, can have existed from all eternity. As far as science can teach us, it is ascertained that not a particle of matter in the world has been absolutely destroyed since the creation; but it is obvious, amidst the constant change to



which all matter is subjected, there may possibly be a tendency to destruction incredibly minute in its operation, beyond the power of the analysis of the chemist, for if the world lost only a millionth part of a grain of sand in a million of million years, it would ultimately be destroyed, and that before the morning of eternity had commenced. If there be really no tendency at all to deterioration of matter in an illimitable course of ages, the conclusion is that the ability of destroying is limited to the same power that created. The idea of matter existing from eternity seems at variance with our instinctive conjectures on the subject; but whatever doubt may rest upon this point, there can be none that matter is not in itself possessed of a creative tendency. This train of reasoning leads to the conclusion that there must have existed through infinite time a sentient incorporeal power, endued with the ability of creating and destroying, for nothing could ever come of nothing, and without a sentient power, creation was obviously impossible. This is what the Scriptures tell us concerning

God.—“No man hath seen God at any time.”—“God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”—“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”—Even a single power, such as electricity, or any of the impalpable agencies discovered by the aid of modern science, could not have been self-creating, or have existed by themselves from eternity, as there is no reason to imagine they are endowed with any kind of creative power, but rather are ethereal agents depending for their being on certain combinations of inanimate matter, which we know could never have been an emanation from nothing. They are sometimes formative, inasmuch as they rearrange pre-existing elements; but never creative, and never converting inanimate matter into vegetable or animal life. Thus were the existence of matter from eternity contended for as possible, there would still be the admission of a creative power required in order to assign a cause for the existence of any-

thing possessing life, which certainly cannot have spontaneously issued from inanimate matter. We cannot account for the appearance of the most insignificant family of lichens, much less for the marvellous structures of living creatures, without admitting in each instance the miraculous interposition of a higher power, and hence the existence of a Creator. It is unnecessary, although the consideration of the subject would add great force to the argument, to enter into the evidences of wisdom and design evinced in the formation of all living beings, the position contended for being merely, that no substance possessing what we term life could possibly have emanated from matter without the intervention of a sentient power. Whatever theory be adopted, the inevitable result is the necessity of assuming the existence of a First Cause. Even if we went the length of supposing with some, that each globe is a living being, producing on its surface from itself plants and animals adapted to that surface, yet shall we be equally at a loss to account for the creation of that living globe without divine intervention. The re-

duction to the absurdity of self-creation is the ultimate result of any theory which does not accept, as a truth, the existence from everlasting of a God of infinite power. So Aristides the Sophist, in his Hymnus in Jovem, declares that Jupiter made all things, but he is careful to inform us that "first of all he made himself," which was certainly a necessary and important preliminary.

4. Although this course of reasoning may be rejected by the atheist as being at best founded on strong probabilities, yet it is on the other hand impossible for the latter to prove that there is no God, or even to do much more than adduce the difficulties which are in the way of our demonstrating with scientific certainty that there is. The atheist may dispute the efficiency of our case with some degree of success, knowing full well that our limited faculties prevent the possibility of bringing forward absolute proof; but he is in far greater perplexity, if he attempt to show the accuracy of his own views; for it is obviously incredible that a being inhabiting a globe, which is at most a mere speck in

the universe, should be able to state with certainty what evidences of a Deity are not hid from our knowledge or senses, or what is contained in that illimitable expanse beyond the worlds that are visible to man. Let the Scriptures be rejected, and it is permitted to neither one nor the other reasoner to establish a theory that shall be without perplexing difficulties and uncertainties. This, indeed, would obviously be impossible, unless we could compass infinite space, and were endued with faculties enabling us to comprehend all things.

5. It must not, therefore, be concealed that, with all our reasonings, and an all but universal belief that there is such a Being, the existence of a God is certainly a proposition that does not admit of strictly scientific demonstration. It is an unhappy and a fatal error to expect mathematical proof of the results of an inquiry bearing reference to theology; and any one who insists on the production of such evidence must conclude by becoming an atheist, or, rather, in reality, by being content to believe in no theory of any

description, for it is certainly more difficult to prove that life and matter have existed from eternity, than it is to show the probability of the existence of a God. But we can demonstrate absolutely neither the one nor the other supposition, and we can only believe that, in the latter alternative, is comprised the truth, by being satisfied with that kind of analogical reasoning by which the truth of the Christian religion, or the indestructibility of the soul, is shown to be probable. A belief in any one of these truths necessarily involves a certain admission into the mind of that quality which the Scriptures term *faith*; and, without that mental quality, there can be no religion whatever. We can only prove the truth of the Christian religion to the same extent that we can demonstrate the existence of a Creator,—by showing that its truth is infinitely probable, and that an acceptance of its reality is accompanied with much fewer difficulties than is any theory which dismisses it as false. It should ever be remembered that the arguments on these subjects ultimately resolve themselves into a

contest of opposite improbabilities, and are surrounded by difficulties and mysteries, some of which may be capable of explanation, but many will never be solved by human wisdom. There is no limit to the unanswerable queries that may be propounded; though some, which are at first view insolvable, admit of rational interpretation.

6. In any discussion respecting the truth of the Scriptures entered into by sceptics, the first chapter of Genesis is usually adduced by them as presenting an insuperable difficulty. The objection, however, seems on examination not to be founded so much on the statements therein contained, as to aim at the improbability of a revelation being made by God to man in a written book composed by inspired authors, those "holy men of old" who wrote with knowledge and wisdom given to them by the Creator. Unless it be boldly asserted that revelation, if from God, must have been communicated in some other fashion, it is obvious that it was necessary to guard against imparting the information in a form which, by its contradiction of accepted

truths and by its apparent impossibility of truthfulness, would have risked its rejection and loss, a contingency highly probable if the discoveries of modern science had been miraculously anticipated, beyond a certain limit, by the sacred historians. Were the present era the time chosen for the first promulgation of the divine word, it would be necessary to adapt the history of creation to the understanding of men, and not to forestall those future discoveries of science which, if now revealed, might be thought foolishness. Above all, it must be considered that, if the mysteries of creation were exactly disclosed, they would probably either be far beyond our comprehension, or would appear so extravagant, that the revelation would be rejected by all, and lost for ever to the world without a special intervention. Such considerations may, at all events, induce us not hastily to reject the more ancient portion of the Scriptures, because a few statements in them appear at first sight to be irreconcilable with the discoveries of modern science. The more we examine into and reflect upon the necessity of a reve-



lation being in some degree adapted, in those matters which are within the comprehension of men, to the time at which it is to be embraced by the human intellect and propagated by human agency, the more we shall feel convinced that, unless the entire system of its communication were to be altered, a strictly scientific disclosure of the workings of God in nature would not be likely to serve either the temporal or the spiritual interests of the human race.

7. If, however, objection is taken to a literal interpretation of this celebrated chapter, the Scriptures themselves furnish an explanation of what is considered the chief difficulty, the assertion that the world was formed in six days; for the Creator is that God of whom we are told that,—“one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” In fact, although it was necessary to mention an interval of time in order to render the history intelligible to those for whom it was written, and to all men of all ages, yet our ideas of time bear no relation to the workings of an infinite being existing

through all eternity, to whom one day and a thousand years are, in respect to time, one and exactly the same thing. A limited time, or time in the sense we understand it, is a miraculous creation, as much as is that of matter or life; it is something utterly unconnected with the attributes of God, and the word can only be used in a symbolical sense when applied to the actions of that great Being. In modern science, there is a symbol used to express infinity, an unknown quantity which is the result of more than one algebraic operation. Thus, the simplest theorem in connection with that symbol is the total depression of any finite quantities that come at the same time into contact with it. For example, 1 added to or subtracted from infinity equals 365,000, added to or subtracted from the same quantity. In like manner, 1 divided by nothing leaves a quotient represented by infinity; and 365,000, divided by nothing, also leaves the same quotient,—infinity. This is exactly what the inspired writer told us in ages long passed away, before algebra was known, or any of the remarkable combi-

nations and results arising from a mathematical use of a symbol representing infinity were suggested. Adopting the above view, the six days mentioned in Genesis may fairly be considered six intervals or periods of time, each being of immense duration, yet no more than days when considered in relation to an Infinite Creator. We are too apt to measure the workings of God by the compass of our own intellects; to forget that in all of them are involved the dealings of the infinite with the finite,—the dealings of Him to whom time, size, and space are relative, not absolute. The references to “the evening and the morning,” which are found after the account of the creative work of each day or period, appear to be indicative of the division of the Creator’s exercise of power into distinct periods, the seventh, that in which the work of creation has ceased, being typical of the Jewish Sabbath. It seems difficult, on the supposition of any other theory, to account for the repetition at the end of the description of the work accomplished on each of the six days. If this be the case, we are now living in the Sabbatical day or period.

8. The discoveries of modern science, aided by the researches of the geologists, have exhibited the impracticability of many of the old and popular theories of the atheist, especially those which account for the existence of man and the animals by imperceptible changes, through an illimitable course of ages, of pieces of matter, endued with peculiar tendencies, working themselves gradually into forms, and ultimately, by obscure changes, into the beings that now inhabit the earth. Were this theory true, the rocks would unquestionably furnish specimens of these progressive creations in some of the supposed states of transition. But nothing is more distinctly proved than the new creation of the superior living animal, man, about the time supposed to be referred to in the Scriptures, by some miraculous effort the appreciation of which is totally beyond our natural understandings. According to the book of Genesis, "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground," a statement which at first sight appears mysterious, when applied to the work of a being of infinite creative power,

who could obviously at pleasure have dispensed with or created the material. These expressions, which appeared unintelligible for so many ages, may now be fully understood. It has been satisfactorily proved that the chemical elements forming the animal are obtained from the vegetable, which, in its turn, is composed of those derived from the earth; while the elements of which the animal is composed return again to the soil. In this respect, therefore, there is not only as much consistency as could have been expected between scientific discovery and statements or incidental allusions in the works of the inspired writers, but a strong testimony is afforded in support of the special character of their works, for it is scarcely possible to imagine that an uninspired author, in the dark ages of the world, would of himself suggest that the complicated and wonderful structure of man was created out of mere dust. No reason could have possibly existed for the selection of a material which must then have appeared in itself the most incongruent. It appears also, from the book of Genesis, that the first

substance possessing life created on the earth was the lower kind of vegetable, an assertion confirmed by the investigations of the best authorities in natural science, who have proved that there was a time, in the history of the earth, antecedent to the commencement of either animal or vegetable life, and who regard the existence of every species of plant and animal only to be accounted for on the supposition of the performance of a separate miracle. In any other view, the fact of their being is wholly incomprehensible. There is no evidence which leads to the belief that a single species could have been, by a natural process, developed, in any conceivable length of time, into another species. All scientific experiment and research tend to show that the commencement of each must have been miraculous.

9. The formation of man out of earth, or out of elements of which earth is composed, is still less mysterious than the creation of the human mind, accompanied by the communication of that vital principle, we term life, to the created body. Our senses are

altogether too limited to comprehend the process by which this principle was communicated, or by which it continues to operate. We are utterly unable to explain in what manner life attaches to the new-born child, how it is sustained through a series of years, or how it apparently terminates; yet, with some inconsistency, many would raise a doubt as to the continuance in space of the “living soul”—the intelligent mind of man—after the dissolution of the material substance in which it is temporarily contained, chiefly because that such is the fact has not been made palpable to our senses. It is sufficient to bear in mind that, by our unassisted knowledge and intellect, it is physically impossible that we can ever arrive at any certain knowledge, either of that which relates to the immaterial spirit sustaining the intellectual mind, or of the process which commences physical life. The living body of man is a compound of matter endued with animal life, and inhabited by a spiritual essence, the latter being of a character the comprehension of which is beyond the intelligence of our senses. Like other com-

pounds, it is ultimately dissolved at death, the matter of which the body is composed returning to matter by a system initiated soon after the creation of man, but the spirit continuing to be subject to the supervising will of God, who, having once joined it to matter, can obviously reunite it at his pleasure, or effect any other combination or disposal of it.

10. We are altogether incapable of defining either matter, or life, or spirituality. They may be metaphysically conceivable, but they are not within the compass of a practical explanation by the aid of the human intellect, or amenable to the conclusions of physical science. All we know with certainty, from our own investigations, is, that a number of worlds exist; that one of these, that which is now inhabited by the human race, was at a remote period entirely composed of inanimate matter; that afterwards vegetables and animals were successively created upon it; and ultimately, man, the creation of the last being accompanied by the peculiarity of the additional gift, the intellectual power or mind. There



is no reasonable theory which accounts for the existence of organic beings, excepting that which assumes the exercise of miraculous power by an intelligent and all-wise Creator. But here human wisdom pauses. The dealings of that Creator with the material world, and with the beings that inhabit it, are involved in mystery, impenetrable by man's reason. We cannot tell, for instance, from our own enquiries, why man was not created so as to be able to exist without nourishment, why he should be allowed to suffer hunger, cold, or thirst, or be liable to injury and disease, or be attainted by sin, or be subject to mental distress, or why he should not be able to walk on the water or fly in the air, or why there should exist those which, in ignorance probably of their use in the economy of nature, we term noxious animals,—nor can we give intelligible explanations of innumerable questions of a like character. Thrown upon the resources of our own minds, we must either be content to believe that we ourselves are capable of sitting in judgment on the designs and workings of the Creator,

or our difficulties and perplexities in reasoning on these matters must be allowed to sink and disappear in a humble submission of the human intellect to the will of God.

11. These few observations on the limited nature of man's intellect, and the obscurity with which the simplest operations of nature are invested, will perhaps be sufficient to prepare the reader's mind for an admission, without which a belief in religion, made known to the human race by any means with which we are acquainted, seems to be impossible. It is this,—that if there be a God of infinite wisdom, who has made a revelation of his will to finite man, it is not only possible, but in the highest degree probable, that such a revelation should include much which is totally beyond the comprehension of the human mind, and that it is not fairly to be rejected either on that account, or because in the mode of its communication, or in its formula, there is much which is foolishness to this world, in other words, the wisdom of which is not apparent to our minds. Neither must such revelation be rejected, but on the

contrary be considered most likely to be of divine origin, if its truth rests chiefly on miracles. The gift of a revelation without miracles is, as far as we know, a moral impossibility; and, if there be a God at all, the absence of a revelation would be a more astonishing and incredible circumstance than any number of miraculous occurrences whatsoever.

12. Let, then, a candid inquirer approach the subject of a religion stated, on what are believed to be sufficient grounds, to be a revelation from the same God who has thought fit to invest the simplest operations of nature with mysteries and difficulties beyond the capacity of human reason to solve or comprehend. Let it be also particularly remembered that this infinite Being has not granted the ability of creation to any substance, animate or inanimate, but has condescended to exercise miraculous interpositions in the first production from the earth not merely of man or animals, but in that of the simplest insect or plant, a fact in itself controverting what has been termed the

antecedent incredibility of miracles; and surely it will be admitted that such a religion is likely to be introduced under conditions similar to those by which the other arrangements of the same Power are regulated. It can, therefore, be no fair objection to Christianity in itself, that there is much in the mode and contents of its revelation which is mysterious, and that it was accompanied by the working of miracles, chiefly of a simple character, performed by the action of the infinite will operating upon elements already in existence. Bearing this in mind, we will suppose, for the sake of argument, that the Scriptures were not accessible to us, and proceed to state the following circumstances respecting the history of the Christian religion, gathered from independent authorities, the validity of which is not questioned by the professed enemies of the Gospel. In strictness, this religion, viewed in connection with the elder revelation, should be termed a new dispensation; but the object of these pages has chiefly reference to the establishment of the divine origin of the mission of Christ by

the production of historical testimonies respecting itself, exclusive of its relation to the more ancient Scripture.

13. During the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius Cæsar, emperors of Rome, there lived in Palestine a member of the Hebrew race named Jesus Christ. He was of humble origin, considered the son of a carpenter, and associated with a number of persons, illiterate and unpolished, belonging to the lower ranks of society, and destitute of influence or popular reputation. He delivered himself to the world as the Messiah, so long expected by the Jews ; and, by some means, he founded a new religion, his followers, according to the most ancient authorities, being soon known by the denomination of Christians. In the reign of Tiberius, at the time when Pontius Pilate was the procurator of that emperor in Judea, somewhere, according to our present computation, between the years 25 and 36, this personage, Jesus Christ, was, for some unstated real or assumed offence against the laws, executed by the direction of Pilate. The new religion had made considerable pro-

gress before its founder was condemned to death, for we are informed, by the Roman historian, that it was “checked for awhile” by his execution. But it soon recommenced its career with renewed vigour, and spread not only over Judea, but so rapidly in other parts of the world, that, within twenty or thirty years after the death of Jesus, a “vast multitude” of Christians were discovered at Rome itself (*Tacit. Ann. xv. 44*). The extraordinary rapidity with which the new faith was promulgated is rendered still more remarkable by the circumstance that the persons who embraced it were exposed to virulent hatred and persecution, and were subjected, on account of their novel religious belief, to the most cruel tortures, sufferings, and deaths. They were regarded as enemies to the human race, were accused, without evidence, of the commission of horrible crimes, and were exposed to aggravated insults and oppression. Although the slightest recantation of the faith established by Christ sufficed to relieve them from these fearful consequences, and although, without this, even a

formal acknowledgment of the heathen divinities was in most cases deemed an ample submission, the Christians refused to surrender for an instant the position they had voluntarily assumed under such discouraging circumstances. This was an acceptance of a new revelation, accompanied by a rigid determination not to recognize in any way the national religions of the pagan world, which, it must be recollected, were then an integral part of state government, the laws compelling the observance of at least an external conformity to some of their ordinances. The pertinacity with which the Christians adhered to the new faith under the severest trials is not to be accounted for by any of the inducements ordinarily deemed worthy of self-sacrifice. Far from pandering to the tastes of this world, or holding out to his followers the slightest hope of personal aggrandisement, or indulging them with the permission of gratifying a single passion, the founder of the new religion openly anticipated no expectation on this earth for the converts but the endurance of trial and persecution for the

sake of the faith; and he inculcated a morality so pure as to be virtually impracticable of attainment,—the perfection of moral virtue, towards which the best of men could do no more than attempt an imperfect approximation. About sixty or seventy years after the death of Jesus, legal trials of the Christians on account of their religion had become general throughout the Roman empire. The persecution, fomented and strengthened by the fanatical hatred of the populace to the new sect, exceeded the bounds of even the appearance of justice, death being unhesitatingly inflicted on any who merely confessed their belief in the truth of Christianity. No efforts were spared to tread out the embers of the new religion, to absolutely destroy it; but the horrors of persecution were ineffectually opposed to the constancy, determination, and living faith of the disciples of Christ. An examination, conducted, with a process of torture, in the year 107, failed to discover more than the inflexible tenacity with which the Christians adhered to their belief, and the extreme purity and simplicity



of their lives. In books compiled towards the close of the first century, and in those dating from that period in an unbroken series to the present time, are allusions to facts and texts, now preserved in the Gospels, in explanation of this faith adopted by the Christians; those Gospels themselves being alluded to by many writers of the second century; nor has there been any notice, in the eighteen centuries that have elapsed since the death of Christ, to lead to the supposition that there ever was any narrative contradicting his history, as it is now received, or that his followers ever grounded their belief on an account essentially different from the latter. This summary includes the circumstances which limit in one direction the adverse case respecting the truth of Christianity, the argument thus far consisting of facts which the opponents of the religion are compelled to admit, as being derived from sources universally acknowledged to be of valid authority. The statement, as above set forth, is independent of any information afforded by the writers of the books of the New Testament.

It is founded on evidences restricted to those passages in the writings of other authors of the first and second centuries, the authenticity of which has not been questioned by those who have indulged in the most sceptical criticism.

14. The earliest period at which the Christians are named, by the Roman authors, as forming a distinct sect, is the reign of the emperor Claudius, that is, between A. D. 41 and A. D. 54. The passage, which is a somewhat obscure one, occurs in Suetonius, in his life of that emperor, who, according to the biographer “ banished the Jews from Rome, who were continually making disturbances, Christ being their leader,” meaning, it is supposed, “ there were disturbances among the Jews and others at Rome, upon occasion of Christ and his followers ;” the probability being that the introduction of the new faith was violently opposed by the large congregation of Jews who had then long been settled at Rome, and occupied no inconsiderable portion of the city. If this interpretation be correct, it follows that the Christians had ap-

peared at the metropolis of the Roman empire in considerable numbers within twenty years after the ascension. A more literal translation of the words of Suetonius would be that Claudius “expelled from Rome the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.” The historian perhaps had heard of the Christ, that is, the Messiah, having been used as a rallying name in the Jewish rebellions, and mixed this up with the rumours that had reached him respecting the Saviour. The statement that the Jews were banished from Rome by Claudius is also mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (xviii. 2), in a passage which is here confirmed by independent testimony. There is another allusion to the Christians in the biographies of Suetonius, the meaning of which is not disputed. It occurs in his life of Nero, who reigned from A. D. 54 to A. D. 68, in the course of which he says, “the Christians, a sort of men of a new and magical superstition, were punished,” that is, executed. It appears from this passage that the Christians were then considered a new sect,

were persecuted on account of their religion, and were in numbers sufficient to occasion the alarm and hatred of the pagans, though whether at Rome, or in the provinces, is not distinctly to be inferred.

15. These ancient notices of the converts to the new faith, however valuable in themselves, especially were there no other early independent testimony of similar claims to authenticity, sink into insignificance compared with the well-known account in the annals of Tacitus, referring to the large number of Christians at Rome in the year 64. This accurate and philosophical historian, after giving a description of the terrible fire in that city in the tenth year of Nero, A.D. 64, and mentioning the suspicions entertained of the sovereign himself being implicated in the origin of the calamity, proceeds to observe,—  
“But neither these exertions, nor his largesses to the people, nor his offerings to the gods, did away the infamous imputation under which Nero lay, of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To put an end, therefore, to this report, he laid the guilt, and inflicted

the most exquisite tortures, upon a set of people, who were holden in abhorrence for their crimes, and popularly called Christians. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator, Pontius Pilate. This deadly superstition, thus checked for awhile, broke out again; and spread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither everything bad upon the earth finds its way and is practised. Some who confessed their sect were first seized, and afterwards by their information, a vast multitude were apprehended, who were convicted, not so much of the crime of incendiarism, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings at their execution were aggravated by insult and mockery; for some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs; some were crucified; and others, reserved for the flames, were burnt when the day closed, that they might serve as torches to illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens for these executions, and exhibited at the same time the Circensian

games ; being a spectator of the whole, in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the spectacle from his car. This conduct made the sufferers pitied ; and though they were criminals, and deserving the severest punishments, yet they were considered as sacrificed, not so much out of a regard to the public good, as to gratify the cruelty of one man." This testimony to the rapid dissemination of the Christian faith emanates from an authority that has never been questioned. It establishes beyond the power of dispute, that Jesus Christ was put to death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator, Pontius Pilate ; that from him the Christians derived their name and creed ; that the religion was instituted in Judea, whence it spread, notwithstanding the temporary interruption to its progress occasioned by the execution of its founder, not only through that country, but to such an extent in other parts of the world, that in the short period of thirty years a great multitude (*multitudo ingens*) of Christians were discovered at Rome, a fact

which leads almost necessarily to the belief that they had then penetrated to many other parts of the empire ; it being extremely unlikely that the dissemination of the doctrines of a new sect, originating in Judea, should have been restricted, in its external reception, to a single distant city.

16. The narrative of Tacitus establishes, amongst others, the facts of the Christians congregating at Rome in large numbers as early as A.D. 64, and of their being at that time the subjects of the intense hatred of the populace. The persecution of Nero recorded by that historian was not in itself instituted against the faith, but with the desire of removing from himself the suspicion of having been the cause, either directly or indirectly, of the disastrous fire ; yet it is evident that the Christians were selected for the objects of the exercise of his fury, on account of the known disposition of the public towards them. They were condemned, says Tacitus, “ not so much for the crime of incendiarism as of hatred to mankind,” or, as it may perhaps be translated, “ as of practising that which is

abhorrent to mankind;" and their faith was a "deadly superstition," and an "evil." These words, taken in connection with the testimony of Suetonius (Nero, c. 16), that, in the same reign, necessarily therefore before A.D. 68, "the Christians, a sort of men of a new and magical superstition, were punished," show that the converts had incurred heavy penalties on account of their religion. The important fact is established, that they were executed because they were Christians, that the mere circumstance of belonging to the new sect was attended with great danger. It seems impossible to account for the general ill-feeling borne towards them by the Roman people, without assuming that the cause existed in the neglect exhibited by the converts towards the ancient polytheism, and that hence they were popularly regarded as the enemies of the gods. They were "held in abhorrence for their crimes," observes the historian; but in such an age and country, no kind of profligacy, even if we admitted the very improbable supposition the entire body could have been distinguished by such crimi-



nality, was altogether insufficient to have engendered a fanatical hatred against them on the part of the Romans. To judge, indeed, from the impurities sanctioned by Paganism, it would have been almost a recommendation. Adopting the former view, the populace would readily entertain the truth of any accusations brought against members of an illegal sect, who were adversaries of the national religion, and consider them "deserving the severest punishment." At a later period, these calumnious imputations, grounded in some instances on perversions of doctrinal opinions respecting the Eucharist, were propagated with every accompaniment malice could conceive; nor is it likely that the reports against the Christians, alluded to by Tacitus, were of a less shameful character, even if they were not the originals of the other slanders, as indeed appears to be insinuated by Melito of Sardis (*Euseb. Hist. Eccl. iv. 26*). One of these, a supposititious account of an esoteric mode of initiation into the new society, related by Minucius Felix (*Octavius, c. 9*), will suffice to exhibit the recklessness

with which the most improbable stories were invented and propagated,—“ a new-born infant, entirely covered over with flour, so as to deceive the unwary, was presented to the knife of the proselyte, who unknowingly inflicted many a secret and mortal wound on the innocent victim of his error ; and as soon as the cruel deed was perpetrated, the sectaries drank up the blood, greedily tore asunder the quivering members, and pledged themselves to eternal secrecy by a mutual consciousness of guilt.” It was as constantly affirmed that this inhuman sacrifice was attended with other rites of nearly as infamous a character. Do you believe, asks Justin Martyr, in the Dialogue of Trypho, we eat the flesh of men? “ Our accusers,” observes Athenagoras, “ charge us with feasting on human flesh,” *Apol.* 31. Another early writer, Theophilus of Antioch, begs Autolycus, to whom he addresses his defence of the Christian religion, to consider if those who are taught the precepts of the gospel, “ are able to live indifferently, and to mix together in lawless unions, or, what is most impious of all things, to feed

on human flesh ; since indeed it has been forbidden us even to see the shows of the gladiators, that we may not become partakers or accomplices in blood," lib. iii. c. 15. " Oh ! how great the glory of that magistrate," exclaims Tertullian (Apolog. 2), " if he should hunt out one who hath already eaten an hundred infants ; but we find even inquiry into our case forbidden," the writer alluding here to the rescript of Trajan, addressed to Pliny, which will be noticed afterwards. Many other reproaches were cast upon the converts, but it is hardly necessary to sully the page with an enumeration of the unsupported tales related to their discredit, some of which include accounts of the wildest excesses of intemperance and passion.

17. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the value and importance of the testimony furnished by the account quoted from Tacitus, which entirely disposes of a theory, in many respects the most plausible one to which an infidel could otherwise have had recourse, that the Christian religion could have arisen or been invented after the destruction of Jeru-

saalem by Titus, A.D. 70, for here we have unquestionable proof that the new creed had spread over a considerable portion of the ancient world at least sixteen years before that event. Every fragment of evidence remaining on the subject tends to the same conclusion, and it appears incredible that the religion, if a mere imposture, could have been propagated in so brief a period by persons moving in an inferior station of life, many of whom, if there were any deception, must be supposed to have risked their lives for the support of the truth of that which they knew of their own knowledge to be false. The words of the Roman historian show that Christianity originated with Jesus, and that its progress was interrupted by his crucifixion, so there can be no doubt that the religion itself was contemporary with its founder. This conclusion is of immense significance. It compresses the possibilities of the truth of any theories founded on the assumption of the gospels being false, within limits that nearly reduce such a supposition to an impossibility. If no miracles had been performed, no evidence of superior

power exhibited, and the Saviour had given no indications of the reality of his divine mission, there could not have been sufficient reasons for his being accepted by any as the Messiah. A mere statement to that effect, with no signs of any kind to support it, would obviously have been a failure. The spread of the Christian religion without miracles would, as an early writer (Chrysostom, A.D. 398) observes, have been a greater miracle than any recorded in the New Testament. On the other hand, if the alleged miracles had been fabricated, the faith was being propagated at a time when there were thousands of living witnesses who had either seen Jesus, or had opportunities of ascertaining the correctness of many of the circumstances of his life, and who could have at once thrown discredit on the promulgators of fabricated stories. "The works of our Saviour," observes Quadratus, writing about the year 120, "were always conspicuous, for they were real; both those that were healed, and those that were raised from the dead; who were seen not only when they were healed or raised,

but for a long time afterwards; not only whilst he dwelled on this earth, but also after his departure, and for a long time after it, insomuch that some of them have reached to our days." No doubt can be entertained of the very ancient date of this important testimony, the *Apology of Quadratus* having been presented to the emperor Adrian, who died in the year 138.

18. That the miracles attributed to Christ at the commencement of the propagation of the religion were the same with those recorded in the gospels, is a fact as well supported as could have been expected. The excessive hatred borne by the Romans to the adherents of the new faith, and their anxious desire to suppress it, as implied by the words of Suetonius and Tacitus, both of them authors of the first century, satisfactorily account for the partial notice of the religion recorded by the few contemporary heathen writers who might have furnished more information on the subject; but the history of Jesus is referred to by an immense number of early writers, none of whom present any account essen-

tially opposed to that recorded by the evangelists; and many of them incidentally confirm the latter in almost every page. A strong testimony to its general truth, and to the importance which attached to all the words and actions of the Saviour, is furnished by the large number of heresies that obtained in the first and second centuries, when so many able men, indulging in controversies respecting the Christian doctrine, continually referred to the miracles and sayings of Jesus. It cannot also be doubted, that, if the gospels had contained statements absolutely inconsistent with those in earlier narratives, the opponents of Christianity would eagerly have seized on a circumstance so important for the attainment of their object; and there is no reason whatever for supposing, what would be a mere gratuitous and unsupported assumption, that the miracles therein described are not the same with those in oral circulation amongst the apostles and their followers. Strict proof of either position is unattainable, but what evidence there is, as well as all probability, tend to show that the evangelical accounts

were always received as authentic, and that they agreed in substance with the relations or fragmentary narratives currently accepted before they were written. The notices of the gospels by the ancient writers are brief but important; and, setting aside the testimony of St. Paul and the other authors of the epistles in the New Testament, which are too well known to require notice, and will not generally be accepted as good evidence by sceptics, the reader will be enabled to form his own opinion on the subject if there are here produced some of these allusions from works of undoubted antiquity, which were not written for the purpose of testifying to the truth of Christianity, and, as might be anticipated, contain merely incidental allusions, so introduced that they will be admitted by all fair reasoners to show in themselves the unbiassed nature of their testimony. A demonstration of the great antiquity of the gospels, by means of the production of quotations from or references to them in other works, involves to a great extent the proof of the contemporary existence of the evangelical account of the



Christian miracles, for it is not possible to imagine that the former could ever have been entirely dissociated from the latter.

19. The literary intercourse of the ancients was not accompanied with the facilities which are at the present day so common as to be hardly appreciated. At a time when a new book could only be circulated very slowly and with great efforts, and when even correspondence between individuals was attended with considerable difficulties, it must not be too confidently expected that, at this late period, when so many works of the first and second centuries of the Christian era have perished, we should meet with references to any particular history made very soon after its appearance. It is only in rare instances that an immediate recognition of the writings of so remote an author by a contemporary can now be discovered; and it is not unusual to meet with cases where very considerable intervals elapse between the date at which a particular book appeared, and the earliest notice of such work in any production at present known. The exact era of the composition of

the gospels cannot, therefore, be ascertained by evidence which merely determines the fact of their existence to a time previously to the most ancient extrinsic mention of them with which we are acquainted, for the obvious reason that the unexpected discovery of a manuscript or roll may on any day satisfactorily prove their higher antiquity. It is sufficient to observe that the want of such notice does not necessarily affect the question of the date of their composition.

20. The earliest notice of any of the gospels *by name* occurs in the fragments of the works of Papias, belonging to the earlier part of the second century. This writer was a companion of Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, and had conversed with those who had seen and heard the apostles. He thus mentions St. Mark,—“ Mark, being the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately whatever he delivered; but not in the order in which things were spoken or done by Christ; for he was neither a hearer nor a follower of the Lord; but, as I said, afterwards followed Peter, who delivered his teachings as occasion

served, but not in the way of an orderly arrangement of our Lord's words. Mark, however, committed no mistake, thus writing some things, as he delivered them; for this one thing he made his care, to omit nothing which he had heard, or to commit any error in what he related." According to Papias, Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew,—“ Matthew wrote the divine oracles in the Hebrew dialect, and every one interpreted the original for himself as well as he was able.” These passages were unhesitatingly considered by Eusebius to refer to the gospels of Mark and Matthew, nor is there any sufficient reason for questioning that such is the case; though it is not necessary to accept the statements of Papias regarding the history of their composition. His assertion, however, respecting the language in which the gospel of St. Matthew was written, is supported by a passage in Irenæus, and by the general tradition of the early church. If the information he gives respecting the gospel of St. Mark be correct, it must be supposed that it was at first arranged in a manner different

from that in which it is now preserved; but, whether Papias was well or badly informed in such matters, the testimony he bears to the existence of two of the gospels in the early part of the second century is equally important. He speaks of himself as one who gathered his information from oral sources, especially from conversations with those who had followed the apostles, “for I did not consider that what came out of books would benefit me so much as what came from the living and abiding voice.” The books to which Papias refers included probably those of the New Testament, for he quoted, in the course of his work, the first Epistles of John and Peter.

21. The gospels are also mentioned by name in an interesting fragment, ascribed to Polycarp, belonging to the same period,—“With reason the evangelists commence their gospels differently, although one and the same desire of publishing the gospel is apparent in them all. Matthew, as writing for the Hebrews, wove into his history an orderly pedigree of Christ, to show that he sprang

from that family, sung of by the whole choir of prophets, as that whence the Saviour should arise. John, set over the Ephesians, who, as Gentiles, knew not the law, derived the commencement of his gospel from the cause of our redemption, which cause is in this manifested that God willed his own Son to take flesh for the sake of our salvation. Luke, however, begins from the priesthood of Zacharias, that by the miracle of his son's birth, and the ministration of so great a preacher, he might declare to the Gentiles the Godhead of Christ. Whence Mark also declares how the words of the prophets spoken of old in a mystery meet together in the coming of Christ, to show that the preaching of Him was no new thing, but revealed in ancient days. Or, perchance, in this the evangelists chiefly sought to use that manner of beginning which they severally judged most likely to meet the desires of those who heard it. No contradiction, therefore, is to be found where still, through a diversity of writings, we arrive at the same country at the last." This fragment (Jacobson, ii. 534)

is preserved in a work compiled by Victor, bishop of Capua, about A. D. 480, and is there stated to be an extract from certain Responsiones of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, the disciple of St. John. It appears to be genuine, but its authenticity cannot, of course, be proved; and it cannot, therefore, without further evidence, be invested with the same authority as that which attaches to the extracts from Papias, the genuineness and antiquity of which are indisputable.

22. After the time of Papias, the references to the books of the New Testament, under the names of the writers to whom they are now ascribed, are of frequent occurrence. Perhaps the most important of these is the following passage in the works of Irenæus, the friend of Polycarp. “We have not received,” observes this author, in his treatise, *Adv. Hær. lib. iii. c. 1*, “the knowledge of the way of our salvation by any others than those by whom the gospel has been brought to us; which gospel they first preached, and afterwards by the will of God committed to writing, that it might be for time to come the

foundation and pillar of our faith; for after that our Lord rose from the dead, and the apostles were endued from above with the power of the Holy Ghost coming down upon them, they received a perfect knowledge of all things. They then went forth to all the ends of the earth, declaring to men the blessing of heavenly peace, having all of them, and every one alike the gospel of God. Matthew then, among the Jews, wrote a gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel at Rome, and founding a church there; and after their death, Mark also, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, delivered to us in writing the things that had been preached by Peter; and Luke, the companion of Paul, put down in a book the gospel preached by Paul. Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon his breast, likewise published a gospel while he dwelt at Ephesus in Asia." That the author of this interesting notice was personally known to Polycarp, the friend and disciple of the apostle John, appears from a letter written by him to Florinus, preserved by

Eusebius, in which Irenæus gives the following account of his recollection of him,—“ I saw thee when I was yet a boy in the Lower Asia with Polycarp, moving in great splendour at court, and endeavouring by all means to gain his esteem. I remember the events of those times much better than those of more recent occurrence. As the studies of our youth, growing with our minds, unite with them so firmly, I can tell also the very place where the blessed Polycarp was accustomed to sit and discourse; and also his entrances, his walks, his manner of life, the form of his body, his conversations with the people, and his familiar intercourse with John, as he was accustomed to tell, as also his familiarity with those that had seen the Lord. How also he used to relate their discourses, and what things he had heard from them concerning the Lord. Also concerning his miracles, his doctrine, all these were told by Polycarp, in consistency with the Holy Scriptures, as he had received them from the eye-witnesses of the doctrine of salvation.” It may be worth notice that Irenæus in another place gives



some fanciful reasons why there should be neither more nor fewer than four gospels. The reasons are frivolous, but the fact of so early a writer confirming the limitation of the present evangelical canon is of some importance. In the Muratorian Canon, an imperfect work by an unknown author, who is proved from internal evidence to have lived about A. D. 170, most of the books of the New Testament are acknowledged. Tatian, A. D. 172, composed a Harmony of the Four Gospels, the same with those now in use, as appears from the fragments of the work preserved by Clement of Alexandria. In the same century, Tertullian gives numerous and explicit quotations from the evangelical narratives; and other contemporary writers, such as Athenagoras, refer to passages in them, as if they were sure to be too familiar to the reader to necessitate the mention of their source. It has been well observed that there are more quotations from the New Testament in the works of Tertullian alone, than there are from all the treatises of Cicero in writers of all classes for several centuries.

23. Quotations of texts, either taken verbally from the gospels, or given from memory, are found in numerous works dating from the time of the apostles in an uninterrupted series to the present day. Before the close of the first century, between A.D. 92 and A.D. 100, Clement, Bishop of Rome, addressed his celebrated epistle to the Corinthians. This writer is supposed, on probable grounds, and on the authority of Eusebius and others, to be the same person who is mentioned by St. Paul, Phil. iv. 3. Irenæus asserts that Clement "had seen the blessed apostles, and conversed with them; he had their preaching still sounding in his ears, and their traditions before his eyes; nor he alone, for there were then (A.D. 92) still many alive who had been taught by the apostles." The subject was one on which Irenæus, writing only about fifty years afterwards, might be supposed to be well-informed; but, at all events, the epistle of Clement is of great and unquestionable antiquity, being mentioned by Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, A.D. 170, as having been "read in that church from ancient times;"

and it is found, with the books of the New Testament, in the Alexandrian manuscript. This epistle was evidently written without any intention on the part of the author of bearing evidence to the truth of the evangelical narrative, but it comprises as much as might have been expected in a composition of that kind, a number of allusions, which are important as showing that the words of the Saviour, and some of the events in his history, recorded in the gospels, were, at the very early period at which Clement wrote, unhesitatingly accepted by Christians as authentic. Any corroborative evidence of this kind is of course of an incidental character, but it must be considered the more rather than the less valuable on that account. Whether it be assumed that the words of Jesus found both in the gospels and in the epistle of Clement are, in the latter, quotations from the evangelists; or if it be thought that they were obtained by Clement from those who had heard them spoken by the Saviour, the testimony is of nearly equal value. If the first opinion be accepted, the evidence of

Clement is of importance in demonstrating the antiquity of the gospels; and, if the other assumption be maintained, a valuable confirmation of the truth of the religion is thus afforded. The epistle of Clement was written with the hope of soothing some disputes that had arisen in the church at Corinth, and, in the spirit of peace, he thus addresses the members of that congregation, c. 13,—“ Let us, therefore, humble ourselves, brethren, laying aside all pride, and boasting, and foolishness, and anger: and let us do as it is written. For thus saith the Holy Spirit, ‘ Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,’ &c. Above all, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, which he spake concerning equity, and long-suffering, saying, ‘ Be ye merciful, and ye shall obtain mercy; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; as ye do, so shall it be done unto you; as ye give, so shall it be given unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye are kind to others, so shall God be kind to you; with what measure ye mete, with the same shall it be measured to you again.’ By this command, and by these

rules, let us establish ourselves, that so we may always walk obediently to his holy words, being humble-minded." Again, in the forty-sixth chapter,—“Remember the words of our Lord Jesus, how he said,—Woe to that man by whom offences come ! It were better for him that he had never been born, than that he should have offended one of my elect. It were better for him that a millstone should be tied about his neck, and he should be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of my little ones.” Clement also alludes to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, to his humility, and to the mission of the apostles ; and he expressly quotes the first epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, a fact of importance, as it is scarcely possible the latter could have been written before all the gospels. At all events, if this be disputed, the allusions to Christ’s history in St. Paul’s epistle must be received as testimonies belonging to the first century ; and it is difficult to say which position is most favourable to the evidences of the religion. The allusions to the history of Jesus, in all the epistles, are so obviously

made incidentally, with no design of testifying to the historical truth of Christianity, they prove at least that the incidents therein referred to were accepted as true by the converts at the time at which they were written.

24. References to the evangelical texts, similar in character to those last quoted from Clement, are found in the epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, which is mentioned by Irenæus in the second century, and is acknowledged to be a genuine work. According to this writer, " Polycarp was not only a disciple of the apostles, and had conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also by them appointed bishop of the church of Smyrna ; him I also saw, when in the prime of my life, for he continued to a great age, departing this life by a glorious martyrdom ; there is a most excellent epistle of his written to the Philippians, from which they who are willing, and are concerned for their own salvation, may learn both the character of his faith, and the doctrine of the truth." In this composition, nearly every one of St. Paul's epistles are distinctly quoted ; words of the

Saviour, recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, are also alluded to; and, in one place, quoting the epistle to the Ephesians, iv. 26, he seems to allude to the canon of the New Testament,—“ I trust that ye are well exercised in the Holy Scriptures, and that nothing is hid from you: but at present it is not granted unto me to practise that which is written,—Be angry and sin not; and again,—Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” That Polycarp was well acquainted personally with those who had known the Saviour on earth is proved by the letter of Irenæus to Florinus, previously quoted. Irenæus obtained that information from Polycarp himself. Contemporary with this writer was Ignatius, who was bishop of Antioch in the latter part of the first and the beginning of the second century. His epistles to Polycarp and to the Romans are referred to by that author himself, and by Irenæus, as testified by Eusebius; and ancient Syriac versions of these pieces have been recently discovered by an eminent scholar, Dr. Cureton, in manuscripts of considerable antiquity. In the former of these

epistles, Ignatius writes,—“be wise as the serpent in everything, and innocent as the dove as to those things which are requisite;” and again,—“charge my brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they love their wives as our Lord his church.” Whether these Syriac versions be the only genuine copies, or abridgements of the originals, it is certain that every allusion to the New Testament found in them is invested with undoubted authority.

25. It should be remembered that it was so much the fashion with the early Christian writers to quote the books of the New Testament without distinct references, and frequently either from memory, or with a regard rather to the retention of the spirit than of the letter, the kind of evidence last adduced, though, considering all circumstances, fairly conclusive, is not so decisive as would otherwise have been the case, when viewed in connexion with the enquiry respecting the antiquity of our present gospels. In another point of view, as involuntary evidences of the essential correctness of the words of the



Saviour as recorded by the evangelists, their value, though in another direction, is of equal importance. Justin Martyr, for example, constantly refers to passages of the same meaning as others found in the gospels, but with so little regard to verbal accuracy, he rarely quotes the precise words; the conclusion arrived at by the best critics being that he quoted them from memory. In one place, however, he employs the exact words as literally used by Matthew and Mark. In the epistle of Barnabas, now generally ascribed to the second century, the author several times employs the language of the evangelists without acknowledgement. The references made by Barnabas to the gospel of St. Matthew, although the name of the apostle is not mentioned, seem to be indisputable,—“ Let us therefore beware, lest it should happen to us, *as it is written*, There are many called, but few chosen.” Again,—“ that he might show that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Many other examples of a like character might readily be produced. What is before us,

however, is sufficient. The habit of transmitting discourses orally was very common in the first two centuries; and there can be little doubt but that much of the gospel narrative was originally circulated in that manner. The written books must for a long time have been comparatively few in number, and could only have been obtained with great difficulty. Added to this, as the religious books of an illegal and unpopular sect, the possession of them must in most cases have been attended with great peril; and some, even of the few copies that were in circulation, were probably destroyed by the enemies of the religion.

26. The great importance attached to the mission of Christ in the first century is strikingly exhibited in the number of doctrinal heresies that arose soon after the establishment of the religion; some of which perhaps resulted from converts declining to surrender tenets in connexion with it which they conscientiously believed to be right, for the sake of securing uniformity of action in favour of the main purpose—the general propagation of the faith. Thus Cerinthus, said to have been

a contemporary of the apostle John, received the gospel of St. Matthew, but rejected the epistles of St. Paul; an example which was followed by the Ebionites, the teaching of that apostle offending the prejudices of the Judaizing Christians. The early notices of these, and other heresies, as they were called, are only useful in our present argument for the corroborative evidence thus afforded of the antiquity of the books of the New Testament, and the impossibility of their having been forgeries, the latter being a circumstance which, if true, would have materially assisted the reasonings of some of the early heretics, and undoubtedly been triumphantly published by them. On this subject, it may be sufficient to quote the following observations of Irenæus,—“ Such is the certain truth of our gospels, that the heretics themselves bear testimony to them, every one of them, starting from these, endeavouring to prove his particular doctrines; but the Ebionites may be confuted from the gospel of Matthew, which alone they receive. Marcion useth only the gospel of Luke, and that mutilated. Never-

theless, from what he retains, it may be shown he blasphemes the one only God. They who divide Jesus from Christ, and say that Christ always remained impassible whilst Jesus suffered, prefer the gospel of Mark. However, if they read with a love of truth, they may thence be convinced of their error. The Valentinians receive the gospel of John entire, and by that gospel they may be confuted. Since, therefore, persons of opposite sentiments agree with us in making use of this testimony, our evidence for the authority of these gospels is certain and unquestionable." Marcion was excommunicated from the church at Sinope, and was altogether in a position very antagonistic to the orthodox Christians. The heretics generally would have lowered the authority of most of the books of the New Testament, had it been in their power to succeed in such an attempt.

27. Perhaps, however, the best reason for accepting the gospels as the narratives which were received by the Christians from the earliest periods as authentic relations of the history of their faith, is the very important

fact that the evangelical works are those referred to by the Epicurean philosopher, Celsus, and the other ancient opponents of Christianity, as the acknowledged canon of the religion. The allusions to the gospels by Celsus are explicit and important. He mentions the gospel of St. Matthew by name, and refers to a variety of incidents in the life of Christ, and to sayings of the Saviour, all of which are found in the New Testament. None of his objections are grounded upon circumstances peculiar to the spurious gospels, nor are there any indications of his having referred to written sources of information other than those which are preserved in the genuine Scriptures. If the popular history of Jesus had essentially varied at any time between the crucifixion and the middle of the second century, a period of nearly one hundred and twenty years, it is incredible that such a startling fact should not have been well and generally known, and referred to by numerous writers, or that an acute opponent like Celsus should not have seized with avidity and expatiated upon so valid an argument ;

but no intimation of this kind is given, with the exception of an allusion to the alteration of certain texts, and the assertion that he purposely refrained from recording many circumstances relating to the history of Christ altogether different from what his disciples had reported. That a distinguished critic, arguing against Christianity with the utmost warmth and hatred to its tenets, and evidently with an apprehension of the effects of its progress—for otherwise a philosopher would hardly have troubled himself to pen a violent attack—should have voluntarily omitted the most forcible arguments within his reach, is inconceivable; and there can be no doubt that the statement is a rhetorical artifice. Neither are there any indications in the work of Celsus sanctioning a theory that assumes the gradual accumulation of stories, relating to the Saviour, invented as time passed on; for he must have known, and in that case would assuredly have included the fact in his argument; had any of the important circumstances in the life of Christ been in his time only recently published; and there was no sufficient period

between the crucifixion and the time at which we first hear of the gospels, to sanction the opinion that there is a possibility the narratives therein contained were mere collections of late traditions. The historical origin of the events of the life of Jesus was not, like that of the tales of the ancient mythology, lost in the depths of antiquity. Those events belonged to a stated time and period, were openly asserted to be connected with numbers of persons through whom for long afterwards there were the means of forming a correct judgment on their credibility, and accounts of them were collected together and published before the time suitable to the proper formation of such a judgment had expired. It is altogether incredible that a mere series of legends could have been framed, and made the foundations of a new faith, in the midst of the numerous practical tests ready for application by any one desiring to expose their fallacy to the public.

28. No independent contemporary account has yet been discovered of the manner in which, or the means by which, the religion

was founded by the Saviour ; and it is not until the lapse of some years after his death, that a faint light is thrown on the subject by incidental allusions in works composed with other designs than that of teaching the world facts then well known to the readers to whom they were addressed. If, however, the evangelical narrative be rejected, we are reduced to the necessity of supposing either that Jesus was received as the Messiah by enthusiastic followers on the sole authority of his own assertion, without the exhibition of supernatural power, or any indications of superiority ; or that, if the supposed miraculous performances really took place, they were mere deceptions. If the former supposition be adopted, it must be believed that the early Christians, with inconceivable folly, and an utter want of principle, collusively united, without the smallest probability of receiving any compensation or obtaining any advantages, not only in palming upon the world a gigantic imposture, but in submitting to refined tortures, often terminating in death, in support of its truth. If the other theory be received,



it must be supposed that a series of fictitious miracles was conceived and executed without detection, an exploit almost incredible if it had been attempted by men surrounded by the appliances furnished by wealth, station, and influence; almost an impossibility, if the inferior social position of Jesus and his followers be attentively considered. Their low temporal condition was as freely acknowledged by the Christians as it was made a ground of objection by their adversaries. The evangelists, observes Chrysostom, "have related who of the disciples were fishermen, and who was a publican; the former a low, the other a disreputable employment; and that Philip was not much more honourable, appears from his country and the place of his nativity." Celsus, the Epicurean, reproaches the Saviour with "being attended with ten or eleven wicked publicans and mariners, going up and down with them, begging his bread from door to door, like a base and most miserable creature." Although this is somewhat an exaggeration, there can be no doubt that Christ and his immediate followers were

entirely destitute of worldly position, a circumstance which increases greatly the improbability of the religion having been established without the assistance of the miracles which are recorded in the gospels.

29. These miracles are too numerous, and for the most part too circumstantially related, to sanction the possibility of their having been deceptively executed by persons situated in the circumstances of Jesus and his followers, without means or influence, and surrounded by numerous enemies. At the same time, it must be conceded that the production of evidence sufficient to prove absolutely the truth of any supposable isolated miracle, alleged to have occurred in ancient times, is nearly if not quite impracticable under any conditions known to us. In most of the recorded cases of the healing of bodily sicknesses by divine interposition, only two persons can know for certain there is an absence of deception,—the individual who proclaims to exercise the power, and the person benefited. To select a familiar example, relating to events nearer to our own times.—Let it

be supposed that the best-informed contemporary historians related that when King John was lying at Swineshead Abbey in the extremity of sickness, Peter the Hermit approached his couch, and by a touch restored him to health. If such a story were promulgated on the best authority, with the written evidences of the witnesses of the occurrence, it would still be fairly in our discretion to doubt the fact, to conjecture the illness were counterfeited for the sake of affording the opportunity for establishing the miracle, or even that the touch of the hermit were, by a singular coincidence, simultaneous with a sudden and extraordinary natural effort relieving the patient. It would be in our election to discredit the truth of such a miracle, however strongly supported, because it would not seem in itself credible that God would interrupt the natural workings of his laws to preserve the life of a worthless monarch, in a case where the success of no great plan of salvation or religious progress was involved. But if the advent of Peter the Hermit had been for centuries foretold in

prophetic writings believed to have been inspired, if it had been reported that he had in open day performed a series of miracles, and if in consequence of the character of his teachings and works, multitudes of people accepted the reality of his divine mission, and died or suffered almost incredible tortures in support of its truth; and if, in addition to this, it were clearly seen that the coming of the Hermit were the crowning termination to a grand scheme for the everlasting benefit of the whole human race, although this miracle, or any other of the miracles, taken singly, were not to be strictly proved, a rejection of their credibility would be accompanied with a far more serious degree of responsibility than could be attached to the reception or rejection of the miraculous character of a solitary preternatural event, unattended by momentous consequences.

30. It may be questioned if the strict proof of any miracle could be substantiated at a period long after the time of its occurrence. In cases where the evangelical account is very circumstantial, as in the narra-

tive of the cure of the blind man in the ninth chapter of St. John, good corroborative testimony must have remained accessible for some years after the event happened; but, at the present day, such instances of detail cannot be fairly said to prove the fact of a miracle, however greatly they undoubtedly add to the probability of the truth of it, for the obvious reason that an inventor would scarcely have ventured to surround a fiction with such particularities. This and the other miracles now, however, take their standing of credibility chiefly on evidence that refers to the general truth of the entire evangelical narrative, rather than on that which can be produced in support of any one separately. The affidavits of the men who were miraculously fed in the desert, if produced, would probably tell no more than the relief of their hunger by the apparently supernatural multiplication of food at the hands of the apostles, in a case where, to the best of their belief, no provision had been previously made. It is inconceivable that such a miracle could have been deceptively executed; but still the

suggested impossibility of producing a legal demonstration of the absence of fraud is not affected by that consideration. A similar remark applies to the great majority of the miracles recorded in the gospels, a perfect belief in which must be left in some measure to individual faith. It is an error to conceal this obvious truth, or to attempt to produce absolute proof of that which was ever intended to be a trial of faith—an essential test of the presence of religious feeling, of a tendency to confide in the providential arrangements of God, terminating in absolute belief when assisted by circumstances showing a high probability of the exercise of that providence. Were it otherwise, the purport of the continual and urgent inculcation of the importance and necessity of faith, which pervades the whole of the New Testament, would be inexplicable. Some of the miracles of Christ were even performed in return, or as a reward, for the exercise of faith; and, in one place, it is stated that he declined to exert his power beyond a limited extent where it was wholly deficient. When the

woman of Canaan solicited his fiat for the recovery of her daughter, he is expressly affirmed to have granted her wish on account of her genuine sincere belief in his divine power. The same spirit pervades many of the other accounts of miracles recorded in the gospels; but perhaps the most striking evidence of the Saviour's own opinion of the necessity of faith, and of the difficulty he foresaw would attend the reception of the new religion in the minds of those who are inclined to insist on the production of strict proof as a prelude to belief, is the narrative, familiar to us all, of the apostle Thomas, recorded by St. John, xx. 24—29; a relation which shows indisputably that a certain degree of faith will be required from the followers of Christ. It is of course easy to enquire and to wonder at the necessity of this; to ask why the certainty of revelation was not written in the firmament; in the same spirit in which the question is asked, in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, why God did not destroy Herod, instead of rendering necessary the flight of Jesus

into Egypt ; or to adduce many other suggestions that could be answered with difficulty, or only by conjecture, as in like manner perplexing and unanswerable enquiries can be adduced respecting the providential arrangements of the material creation. But, setting aside the possibility of faith being a mental element essential to a religious spirit, there may be cogent reasons why the revelation of immortality should be surrounded by a certain proportion of mystery.

31. A degree of obscurity in revelation may be regarded as essential to the present order of the world. We may reasonably be assured, although we now but see through a glass darkly, that as much of God's will is revealed as is consistent with the continuance of mankind in an imperfect state of existence. Why we should have been created at all is not in itself a less perplexing question than why we should have not been created in perfection, without the possibility of the occurrence of any circumstances entailing the entrance of sin and misery ; but accepting the world as it is, and assuming that the



beings living upon it were created for some kind of purpose, and were not the offspring of chance ; believing further in the possibility of some method being adopted to give to the human race a knowledge of the means of salvation,—it was essential that the information should be conveyed in a manner which would not absolutely interfere with, if it did not assist, the transactions and progress of life. Hence, the parabolical language of the Saviour in all that relates to the exact condition of the life after death. Were the happiness and glories of a future state distinctly revealed, or so certainly set before us as to physically prove to all the spiritual change effected by dissolution, the probability is that we should be totally unfitted for and disregard altogether the work of this life, lost in the contemplation of that which would render the world an object of no concern. The mystery attending the Christian revelation is probably essential to the sustentation of the present condition of the human race ; and so far from this constituting a difficulty requiring explanation, it is really, if not an evidence,

at least a circumstance favourable to a belief in the divine authority of the religion. The authors of other creeds, such as Mohammed, describe a paradise adapted to the desires and expectations of their followers, whom, we are told by the prophet of Mecca, “ shall dwell in gardens of delight; youths, who shall continue in their bloom for ever, shall go round about to attend them with goblets and beakers, and a cup of flowing wine; their heads shall not ache by drinking the same, neither shall their reason be disturbed; and with fruits of the roots which they shall choose, and the flesh of birds of the kind which they shall desire; and there shall accompany them fair damsels, having large black eyes, resembling pearls hidden in their shells, as a reward for that which they have wrought.” Jesus, on the contrary, by his disinclination to enter fully into the subject, assumes that the nature of a future reward would be unintelligible to the finite human intellect. The utmost explanation vouchsafed to us is that, “ in the resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but

are as the angels of God in heaven." Thus even the Christian's reward for faith is, as to its exact nature, itself a subject of faith.

32. While, however, asserting that faith is an essential element in a complete and perfect belief in the Christian religion, it must not be assumed that it is a blind acceptance of a creed on the arbitrary decree of authority that is required; but rather a faith exerting itself in unison with intellectual enquiry and scientific investigation. No doubt, it is gratifying to believers, and sometimes perhaps a subject of envy to sceptics, to witness the simple trusting faith of the single-minded; but in every large civilized society there will ever exist a considerable number, and those amongst the influential and the leaders of public opinion, who will require some reasons for the acceptance of a creed, before yielding to evidences of an internal character. It has been providentially ordered for the best interests of the human race, which are indissolubly connected with the progress of Christianity, that the truth of the religion, like the truth of the existence of a God,

although not admitting of what may be termed strict demonstration, is subject to the production of testimonies rendering it susceptible of the highest degree of probability. Enough, and more than enough, can be proved to satisfy the reasonable demands of any one who is at all desirous of believing. Were the evidences far stronger, they would not suffice to convince those who approach the subject with a rigid determination to require a kind of testimony inaccessible under the circumstances, or with a heart altogether predisposed to reject the doctrines of the gospel. In respect to any occurrence which took place at so remote a period, bearing reference to the establishment of a new religion by the aid of miracles, it is scarcely possible to imagine a species of evidence the effects of which could not be neutralized by the intimation of some adverse argument; nor could absolutely demonstrative testimony exist at the present day without the continued operation of a special divine intervention. Strict legal proof of the gospel narrative is certainly unattainable; but it must be borne

in mind that the same condition attends most if not all the records of events in ancient history, which would generally fail to carry the conviction of their truth to modern enquirers, were they subjected to the same tests which are demanded by infidels to be applied in considering the probability of the correctness of the relations transmitted to us by the evangelists. The reasonings of modern opponents of Christianity are frequently distinguished by the imposition of conditions inconsistent with the state of the historical remains of antiquity.

33. Another kind of unfairness to which the arguments in favour of the Christian belief are often subjected is the absolute rejection of the best testimonies that can possibly be obtained,—the evidences of persons who witnessed the miraculous events recorded in the gospels, and who were by that means converts to the faith. Those who were not converted were either Jews, whose strongest prejudices were offended by the unostentatious appearance of the Messiah, and who insisted on his miracles being impostures, or attributed

them to magic ; or heathens, whose prepossessions against a religion subverting the ancient faith were equally antagonistic to a reception of the truth. It may be fairly assumed that, excepting in rare instances, those who saw any considerable number of the miracles could not but be convinced, in their hearts, of the divine nature of the mission of Christ ; so that there is small probability of our obtaining any detailed account of the life of the Saviour, excepting from the believers who witnessed his works, trials, and sufferings. If, then, such records are to be questioned as deriving their statements from assumed interested and biassed writers, whom otherwise are we to trust ? If the events really happened in the manner described, who could be expected to furnish the information respecting them but those who were eye-witnesses and who believed ? If they did not happen, surely some of the contemporary writers of history would have suppressed the new faith, in its first great progress, by stating distinctly on incontrovertible evidence they were imaginary. The truth of the

religion did not, for some time after its commencement, depend on circumstances delivered to the world, and accepted by fanatics without the opportunity of an application of the test of evidence, but on intelligible records of mighty works, the believers in which were surrounded by many who, in Judea at least, had for years the opportunity not only of personally investigating the secondary evidences of the Christian miracles, but who must have met numbers who could have at once exposed beyond contradiction the fallacy of the new belief, had it rested on baseless foundations. When, therefore, it is considered how numerous were the tests of its truth or falsehood that could then have been applied, how liable every statement respecting Christ must have been to adverse criticism, and for how long a period there was a possibility of exposing any grand scheme of deception, had the religion partaken of that character, instead of attempting the impracticable task of adducing proof of miracles which are not, by their very nature, susceptible of such a trial of authenticity, it will be sufficient to satisfy

the candid enquirer to enunciate the following position, which can be sustained by testimonies of indisputable authenticity ;—if the Christian religion be true, and if the events recorded in the gospels really did take place, we should possess the same evidence on the subject which is now accessible.

34. The principal witnesses of the events in the life of Christ were the Jews. This people had long been expecting the promised Messiah, exulting in the anticipation of his temporal rather than his spiritual power, and, in the midst of their degradation, looking forward to unquestioned visions of freedom, political regeneration, and national glory. According to Tacitus, speaking of the state of the Jews previously to the destruction of Jerusalem,—“ the generality had a strong persuasion it was set down in the ancient writings of the priests that, at that very time, the east should prevail ; and that some who came out of Judea should obtain the empire of the world ; which ambiguities foretold Vespasian and Titus ; but the common people, having once appropriated to themselves this vast grandeur



of the fates, could not be brought to understand the true meaning by all their adversities." These cherished expectations, however in some respects natural, were destined to result in bitter disappointment. It is scarcely possible to imagine the extent to which their prejudices must have been affected, when they were not only told that these hopes were fallacious, but that all idea of worldly pre-eminence amongst the nations of the earth was to be abandoned, the efficiency of the splendid ritual of their religion impaired, and that henceforth they were to reject all prospect of aggrandizement in favour of a child, sprung from the humbler ranks of society, cradled in a manger, afterwards a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and ultimately to accept a person executed as a malefactor for the long-promised Messiah. It cannot then be a matter of surprise that numbers amongst the Jews should have entertained an invincible repugnance to the reception of the new religion; but rather a subject for wonder that so many of them should have risked their position, and endured persecution for his sake.

But it is singular, and most extraordinary, if the supernatural works of Christ are assumed to be inventions or delusions, although the religion he established spread with marvellous rapidity throughout Judea, and in less than a century had penetrated to most portions of the ancient world, during that time not a single one amongst the Jewish writers, many of whom were the most interested in exposing an imposture, should have been induced to write a treatise against the Christian faith; leaving any effort of the kind to heathen philosophers, who had no personal knowledge of the subject, and could not have derived information from trustworthy witnesses. The exposure of the deceptive performance of a single miracle would have sufficed to have thrown discredit on the whole of the history which referred to the new dispensation. The Jews had every means of detecting an imposition; they could have appealed to testimonies of undoubted authenticity; and the circumstance of their not adopting this efficient method of stifling the religion in its earlier stages, is a strong argument in favour of an

opinion that the alternative was one beyond their control.

35. Instead of pursuing this course, the ancient Hebrew writers either maintain a studied silence, give utterance to general statements unsupported by valid authority, or, in what they say, confirm the gospel narrative. The intentional omission of reference to the Christian faith is exhibited, in a remarkable manner, in the instance of the *Mishna*, a work containing a large number of Jewish traditions, compiled about A.D. 180, in which no mention whatever is made of Christianity, although there is an entire division in the work on strange and idolatrous worship. At this period the religion had spread to an extraordinary extent. The earliest Hebrew author of any importance, who notices the subject, is Josephus, who wrote towards the close of the first century, and who thus alludes to the Saviour, in a paragraph here divested of its interpolations as settled by Gieseler, an eminent German critic, who certainly does not err on the side of faith,—  
“ About this time lived Jesus, a wise man,

who performed many wonderful works ; and drew over to himself many Jews and many from the Grecian people ; and though Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men among us, condemned him to the punishment of the cross, yet they who had conceived an affection for him, did not cease to adhere to him, and the sect of the Christians, so called from him, subsists to this time." This passage, with additions of a doubtful character, is found in every ancient copy of Josephus, is quoted by Eusebius, A.D. 315, was never questioned as spurious until the sixteenth century, and there is no sufficient pretence for believing any portion of that above given to be an interpolation ; but if it be, it is clear, from the considerations above adduced, the silence of Josephus would be no argument against the truth of Christianity. At the time he wrote, the Christian religion was a subject of notoriety, and it cannot be doubted, as he was not only not a believer, but belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, the enemies of Christ, he would, had it been possible, have adduced statements against its authenticity.

36. The same writer, Josephus, has recorded an interesting notice of John the Baptist. After mentioning the defeat of Herod's army by Aretas, he observes,—“ Some of the Jews were of opinion God had suffered Herod's army to be destroyed as a just punishment on him for the death of John, called the Baptist; for Herod had killed him, who was a just man, and had called upon the Jews to be baptized, and to practise virtue, exercising both justice toward men, and piety toward God; for so would baptism be acceptable to God, if they made use of it, not for the expiation of their sins, but for the purity of the body, the mind being first purified by righteousness. And many coming to him, for they were wonderfully taken with his discourses, Herod was seized with apprehensions, lest by his authority they should be led into sedition against him; for they seemed capable of undertaking anything by his direction. Herod therefore thought it better to take him off before any disturbance happened, than to run the risk of a change of affairs, and of repenting when it should be too late to remedy disorders.

Being taken up upon this suspicion of Herod, and being sent bound to the castle of Machærus, he was slain there." Josephus also alludes to Herod's connection with his brother's wife, Herodias, which was indeed the occasion of the war with Aretas; but he does not appear to have been acquainted with the immediate cause that led to the execution of John. The variations between the account of him in Josephus and that in the gospels preclude the suggestion that the former can have been an interpolation, while it agrees sufficiently in the main points to be considered an important testimony in favour of the authenticity of the evangelical narrative. Both authorities testify to the popularity of the Baptist, and the Jewish historian, not being acquainted with the incident that preceded his execution, very naturally ascribed it to a political motive on the part of Herod.

37. Josephus, notwithstanding the opportunities he possessed of obtaining correct information on the subject, having been born only a few years after the crucifixion, was not a Christian. He attended carefully to

the advancement of his worldly interests, and independently of the circumstance of his being a Pharisee, was a very unlikely person to forsake all, and follow the lowly disciples of the Saviour. It is obviously no substantial argument against the truth of the religion, that so many of the Jews were unbelievers. That they who embraced the faith should have become enthusiasts, having possessed the inestimable privilege of witnessing the Saviour's works and ministry, was to have been expected; and that there were many whose prejudices could not be overcome, is also what might have been anticipated. Forsaken by the main body of the people, persecuted by the rulers, and execrated by many of the ancient priesthood, the followers of the Saviour were compelled to surrender all hopes in this world to publish the tidings of salvation to the nations of the earth. However wonderful may have been his works, had they been far more imposing than those which are related by the evangelists, it is contrary to all experience of human nature to expect that more than a limited number of persons could

be found who would sever all earthly ties, resign the hopes of life, surrender the dearest prepossessions, and voluntarily endure disgrace and persecution for the sake of a spiritual ruler who promised no compensation or reward in this world, but, on the contrary, warned them of the sufferings they must undergo, if they enlisted under the banners of the faith. It was foreseen that an imperfect external conformity to the ancient ritual would be wholly insufficient to reconcile most of the Jews to the reception of the liberal tenets of Christianity.

38. At the first establishment of the Christian church after the ascension, the apostles did not at once abandon the Jewish law, but the Saviour himself had expressed his contempt for mere external ceremonies, and there can be no doubt that many of the Jews rightly considered the tendency of the new mission was to lower the authority of the Mosaic code, and that, in practice, the reception of the Christian religion was antagonistic to the validity of the Jewish ceremonial law, and to the authority of the priesthood. At the time



of Christ, the Hebrew religion had become little more than the result of an obstinate attachment to external observances, unaccompanied with a trace of genuine religious feeling. The exact history of the relations between the Christians and the Jews during the life of Jesus, and for some years afterwards, is chiefly to be gathered from the works of Christian writers. From these it appears that the apostles at first considered it necessary even for the heathens to subscribe partially to the Jewish law on their conversion to Christianity, and that it was not until the period of the ministry of St. Paul, the true spiritual character of Christianity, as taught by its founder, was fully appreciated and developed. But, in the estimation of the strict Jew, there must always have been much in the Christian religion at variance with the complete observance of the Mosaic law, and even the Judaizing Christians must have been objects of suspicion, as they certainly were, at a later period, about A. D. 70, of bitter hatred to the unbelieving Jews. The earliest notice of an enmity between the Jews and Christians, in

heathen works, is in the passage before quoted from Suetonius, who informs us that, in the reign of Claudius, between A. D. 41 and A. D. 54, there was a dispute at Rome between the believing and unbelieving Jews of so serious a character, that they were expelled the city. The antipathy of the Jews to the members of the new religion continued to increase, and the rabbins ultimately made a strict rule that no Jew should converse with a Christian, or listen to any discourse on the evidences of the new faith (*Dial. Tryph.* 38). They even went to the length of anathematizing the Christians in their synagogues. This, says Justin Martyr, addressing the Jews, “ is all you can do. You have not now the power of killing us yourselves, because others have the governing of things; but this you have done, whenever you have been able. Nor have any other people showed so much enmity against us and Christ as you, who have been likewise the authors of all those prejudices, which others have conceived against that righteous person and us his followers. For after that you had crucified that one unblame-

able and righteous man ; when you knew that he was risen from the dead, and ascended up into heaven, according as the prophecies had foretold he should, you were so far from repenting of your evil deeds, that you sent out from Jerusalem chosen men into all the world, giving out that the sect of the Christians is atheistical, and saying all those evil things of us, which they, who know us not, do still say of us." A similar observation is made by Tertullian,—“ the Jews were the principal authors of the evil reports which were spread abroad concerning the Christians.” In another place the same writer (Apol. 7) speaks of the Jews as the natural rivals of Christianity, and the evidence of numerous early authors confirms the statement of the gospels that Jesus was condemned by Pontius Pilate at their instigation. This fact might indeed be regarded as nearly proved by the relation of Tacitus, for had the Saviour been executed for the supposed commission of a moral offence, the circumstance would in all probability have been mentioned.

39. After Pontius Pilate had assented to

the condemnation of Christ, there seems reason for believing that he forwarded an account of the transaction to the Emperor Tiberius, or, at all events, that he mentioned some particulars relating to Jesus in the reports, called Acts, which it was then customary for the rulers of the provinces under the Roman sway to send periodically or at intervals to the head seat of government. Justin Martyr, addressing the emperor Antoninus and the senate of Rome, about A.D. 140, in allusion to the crucifixion, and some of the circumstances attending it, adds,—“and that these things were so done, you may know from the Acts made in the time of Pontius Pilate.” He again uses similar words, appealing to the same authority, with reference to some of the miracles which fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah,—“at his coming, the lame shall leap like a stag, and the tongue of the dumb shall be eloquent, the lepers shall be cleansed, and the dead shall rise and walk about; and how he performed these miracles, you may easily be satisfied from the Acts of Pontius Pilate.” It seems very unlikely, if

authentic copies of such records were not, in his time, preserved at Rome, Justin would have ventured to refer to them in addressing readers who would have been enabled to test the accuracy of such a statement. Whatever may have been the nature of Pilate's communications to the government, the fact of his having made a report on certain matters relating to Christ is of importance as showing they were at least amongst the notorious events that had then occurred in Judea. The circumstances that Acts of Pontius Pilate were forged at an early period by the enemies of the Christians, and that the second title of one of the apocryphal gospels was thus given, presuppose the fact that such documents had been at some time in existence. Tertullian, also, who wrote in the year 198, affirms that Pilate sent an account to Tiberius of occurrences evidencing the divinity of Christ, adding that it was proposed but without success to receive Jesus as one of the numerous deities in the pantheon of the ancient gods; a statement not invalidated by the objection usually urged against its reception,

as it appears from Suetonius that the senate rejected similar proposals, on other occasions, without giving offence to Tiberius. According to Tertullian, that emperor was inclined to favour the Christians, but, if so, it was probably his object to propitiate a section of the people by consenting to admit the founder of their religion amidst the objects of the ancient worship, not with the idea that any risk of overthrowing the latter was involved. It may be that a band of Christians, refusing to join in the worship of the gods, became subjects of notoriety and persecution, and that Tiberius, to put an end to what he might consider an unnecessary inconvenience, adopted that which appeared to him the most obvious method of reconciling the parties, by adding one more to the already extended order of deities, not fancying that so bold an object as the subversion of the national faith could have been entertained. "Search your own writings," says Tertullian, addressing the Romans, "and you will there find that Nero was the first emperor who exercised any acts of severity towards the Christians,

because they were then very numerous at Rome." In other words, previously to the time of Nero, they were not sufficiently numerous or influential at Rome to raise a serious apprehension of danger to the ancient religion. The earliest Christians, as has been observed, were chiefly persons moving in the humbler ranks of society. The emperor Julian, one of the bitterest adversaries of Christianity, after mentioning the conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus, says,—"if there were any other men of eminence brought over to you in the times of Tiberius and Claudius (that is, before A. D. 54), let me pass for a liar in everything I say." When the Christians increased so rapidly in numbers and importance, it was discovered that they were sapping the foundations of the heathen mythology, the indignation of the priests and their numerous followers soon exhibited itself in the most bitter hatred and persecution, which culminated in the outrages recorded by Tacitus.

40. The records respecting the various

persecutions of the Christians in the first century are incomplete and unsatisfactory ; but a notice of a general one in the reign of the emperor Domitian, A.D. 96, is recorded by Eusebius, supported by the testimony of heathen authors,—“ moreover, at this time the doctrine of our faith was so conspicuous, that writers averse to our sentiments have not forborne to insert in their histories an account of this persecution, and the martyrdoms that happened in it. They have likewise exactly marked the time it occurred, relating that, in the fifteenth year of Domitian, Flavia Domitilla, niece by the sister’s side to Flavius Clemens, then one of the consuls of Rome, and a great many others, were banished to the island of Pontia for the profession of the Christian religion.” In another place, he cites, as an authority for part of this statement, Bruttius, a Roman author of the second century ;—“ and Bruttius writes that many Christians suffered martyrdom under Domitian ; among whom was Flavia Domitilla, niece by the sister’s side to Flavius Clemens the consul, who was banished to the island of



Pontia, because she confessed herself to be a Christian." The cell inhabited by Flavia in her exile continued to be pointed out, as a locality of interest to Christians, long after her death.

41. The short reign of Nerva, from A. D. 96 to A. D. 98, appears to have been in some degree favourable to the liberty of the Christians. At least, there is no record of their having been selected for molestation during the rule of that sovereign, whose liberal and judicious edicts were opposed to the system of inquisitorial persecution adopted by his predecessors; but it may be questioned if the Christians wholly escaped the consequences of popular hatred, or if the standing laws of the country were not put in force against them. The personal views of the emperors towards the converts, however inclined to leniency, could not always have effectually stayed the torrent of public dislike and indignation. During the next reign, that of Trajan, who ruled from A. D. 98 to A. D. 117, it is found that the repression of Christianity throughout the Roman empire was accepted

as an established duty on the part of the government, as much as was that of the punishment of the basest crimes. In this reign, Pliny, having been appointed governor of Bithynia, A.D. 106, finding himself in the midst of a general crusade against the Christians, then very numerous in that country, was perplexed as to the extent to which he should countenance the popular feeling against them. Under these circumstances, soon after he commenced the government of the province, he addressed a letter (A.D. 107) to the emperor, soliciting explicit instructions on the subject. It appears from this correspondence, which is of undoubted authenticity, being fortunately preserved in Pliny's Letters, the Christians were accused by secret informers, and were brought to trial, convicted and executed, by the ordinary laws of the Romans established against nonconformists, without the additional authority of an edict from the emperor; a circumstance which seems to prove satisfactorily that the profession of the Christian religion had always been attended with danger. Pliny's letter is also of great

value as an independent evidence of the purity of the doctrine of the early Christians, and of their devotion to the faith in the midst of a virulent persecution.

42. Pliny's Letter to the Emperor Trajan.—

“ It is a rule, sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts; for who is more capable of removing my scruples, or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any trials concerning those persons who are Christians, I am unacquainted, not only with the nature of their crimes, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them. Whether, therefore, any difference is usually made with respect to the ages of the guilty, or no distinction is to be observed between the young and the adult; whether repentance entitles them to a pardon, or, if a man has been once a Christian, it avails nothing to desist from his error; whether the very profession of Christianity unattended with any criminal act, or only the crimes themselves inherent in the profession, are punishable; in all these points I am greatly

doubtful. In the mean while, the method I have observed towards those who have been brought before me as Christians, is this ;—I interrogated them whether they were Christians ; if they confessed, I repeated the question twice, adding threats at the same time ; and if they still persevered, I ordered them to be immediately punished. For I was persuaded, whatever the nature of their opinions might be, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved correction. There were others also brought before me possessed with the same infatuation ; but, being citizens of Rome, I directed that they should be conveyed thither. But this crime spreading, as is usually the case, while it was actually under prosecution, several instances of the same nature occurred. An information was presented to me without any name subscribed, containing a charge against several persons ; these, upon examination, denied they were, or ever had been, Christians. They repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites with wines and frankincense before your statue, which for that purpose I

had ordered to be brought, together with those of the gods, and even reviled the name of Christ; whereas there is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians into any of these compliances; I thought it proper, therefore, to discharge them. Some among those who were accused by a witness in person, at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it; the rest owned, indeed, they had been of that number formerly, but had now, some above three, others more, and a few above twenty years ago, renounced that error. They all worshipped your statue, and the images of the gods, uttering imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a certain stated day before it was light, and addressed themselves in a form of prayer (or hymn) to Christ, as to some god, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purposes of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up;

after which, it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal. From this custom, however, they desisted after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I forbade the meeting of any assemblies. In consequence of this their declaration, I judged it the more necessary to endeavour to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious functions; but all I could discover was, that these people were actuated by a false and excessive superstition. I deemed it expedient, therefore, to adjourn all further proceedings, in order to consult you; for it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration; more especially as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these prosecutions, which have already extended, and are still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. In fact, this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among the neighbouring villages and country. Nevertheless, it still seems

possible to restrain its progress. The temples, at least, which were once almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived; to which I must add, there is again also a general demand for the victims, which for some time past had met with but few purchasers. From the circumstances I have mentioned, it is easy to conjecture what numbers might be reclaimed, if a general pardon were granted to those who shall repent of their error."

43. The Emperor's Reply to Pliny.—“ The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in the proceedings against those Christians which were brought before you, is extremely proper; as it is not possible to lay down any fixed rule by which to act in all cases of this nature. But I would not have you officiously enter into any enquiries concerning them. If, indeed, they should be brought before you, and the crime should be proved, they must be punished; with this restriction, however, that where the party denies he is a Christian, and shall make it evident that he is not, by



invoking our gods; let him, notwithstanding any former suspicion, be pardoned upon his repentance. Informations, without the accuser's name subscribed, ought not to be received in prosecutions of any sort; as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the equity of my government."

44. In Tertullian's *Apology* for the Christians, addressed to the Romans towards the close of the second century, is an interesting allusion to the preceding letter of Pliny, charging them with the inconsistencies involved in the persecution of the members of the new faith solely on account of their religion. There was a constant struggle going on, in the minds of the best informed and most liberal amongst the judges, between a sense of justice and the necessity of pandering to the strong views and fears of the many interested in the sustentation of the ancient polytheism. The passage in Tertullian is somewhat discursive, but its length may well be excused for the sake of the insight it gives into the kind of argument the



Christians were wont to use to their oppressors, at so early a period,—“ Pliny the Second, in his proconsulship of Asia, having put many Christians to death, and turned others out of their places, and being still astonished at our numbers, sends to the emperor Trajan for orders for future proceedings; alleging withal that, for his part, after the strictest enquiry, he could find nothing more in our religion but obstinacy against sacrificing to the gods, and that we assembled before day to sing hymns to God and Christ, and to confirm one another in that way of worship, prohibiting all sorts of wickedness. Upon which information Trajan returns for answer, that such kind of men as these were not to be searched after, but yet to be punished if brought before him. O perplexity between reasons of state and justice! He declares us to be innocent by forbidding us to be searched after, and at the same time commands us to be punished as criminals. What a mass of kindness and cruelty, connivance and punishment, is here confounded in one act! Unhappy edict, thus to circum-

vent and embarrass yourself in your own ambiguous answer ! If you condemn us, why do you give orders against searching after us ? If you think it not well to search after us, why do you not acquit us ? Soldiers are set to patrol in every province for the apprehending of robbers, and every private individual justifies taking up arms against traitors and enemies of the commonwealth, being obliged moreover to make enquiry after conspirators ; but a Christian only is a criminal of that strange kind that no enquiry must be made to find him, and yet, when found, he may be brought to the tribunal ; as if this enquiry was designed for any other purpose but to bring offenders to justice. You condemn him, therefore, when brought, whom the laws forbid to be searched after ; not that in your hearts you can think him guilty, but only to get into the good graces of the people, whose zeal has transported them to search him out against the intention of the edict. This also is very extraordinary in your proceedings against us, that you rack others to confess, but torment Christians to deny ;

whereas, were Christianity wicked, we no doubt should imitate the wrong-doers in the arts of concealment, and force you to apply your engines of confession. Nor can you conclude it needless to torture a Christian into a confession of particulars, because you resolve the very name must include all that is evil. Notwithstanding you presume upon our wickedness, merely from our owning the name, at the same time you use violence to make us retract that confession, that by withdrawing the bare name only, we might be acquitted of the crimes fathered upon it. But now, if your process against us and other criminals be notoriously different, it is a shrewd sign you believe us innocent; and that this very belief of our innocence is the spring which sets you at work for our deliverance by forcing us to deny our name; which though in justice you know you cannot, yet for reasons of state you must condemn. A man cries out upon the rack,—‘I am a Christian.’ You hear him proclaim to the world what really he is, and you would fain have him say what really he is not.

That even judges, who are commissioned to torture for the confession of truth, should abuse it upon Christians only for the extortion of a falsehood! You demand what I am, and I say I am a Christian; why do you torture me to unsay it? I confess, and you rack on; if I confess not, what will you do? If other malefactors deny, it is with difficulty you believe them; but if Christians deny, you acquit them at a word." A similar argument is employed in an interesting passage in the *Apology of Athenagoras*, addressed to the Roman emperors Marcus Antoninus and Commodus, and composed about A.D. 180,—“ If any one can convict us of doing wrong, either little or great, we do not deprecate punishment, but we demand to receive that which is the most severe and unmerciful. But, if the accusation is against our name only (up to the present day at least, what they spread about us is the common and indiscriminate rumour of mankind, and no Christian has been convicted of a crime), it already becomes your duty, most great and benevolent and learned emperors,

to ward off injury from us by law; that, as all the world, both individuals and states, have shared in your benefits, we also may have cause of gratitude towards you, and praise your names for having been released from those who slander us. For it is not consistent with your justice, that other men, hearing a charge of their crimes, are exempt from punishment before they are convicted, but that in our case the name has greater weight than proofs in a court of justice, because the judges do not enquire if the man tried has done any crime, but insult him about his name, as if that were a crime. Those who are judged before you, even if they are defending themselves from the greatest offences, are confident, knowing that you will enquire into their lives, and will not listen to names, if they are empty, nor to insinuations from the accusations if they should be false; they receive the judgment that condemns them with the same justice as that which acquits them. We also, therefore, demand the same right that is shown to all, not because we are called Christians, to

be hated and punished, but to be judged of those things about which any one accuses us, and either to be let go, if we wipe off the accusations, or that those who are found guilty should be punished; not for the name,—for no Christian is a bad man, unless he has falsely assumed the appellation,—but for some crime.”

45. The prevalence of Christianity in Bithynia from fifty to seventy years after the crucifixion, as thus established by Pliny, is a fact of great importance in an argument resting solely on the testimony of independent writers. The inhabitants of that country must at the time have been in intercourse with individuals who had means of judging from the best authorities of the truthful or fallacious character of the mission of Jesus. Had it been an imposture, it seems incredible that, at so brief a period after the death of the founder of the religion, and the creed being established on numerous facts capable of being investigated, they should have adhered to the faith with the singular pertinacity described by Pliny as “a contu-

macious and inflexible obstinacy." Porphyry, a violent opponent of Christianity, relates that a certain person, having applied to the oracle of Apollo for advice as to the course he should pursue to induce or compel his wife to relinquish the new religion, was discouraged from an attempt which the heathen priests knew by experience would fail of success. The answer of the oracle emphatically warned him,—“ Sooner may you write, stamping letters on the water, or, filling light wings, fly as a bird through the air, than reclaim the spirit of your impious spouse. Leave her, therefore, in her error, to chant a hymn, in a faint and mournful voice, to the deceased God, who was publicly condemned to a cruel punishment by judges of singular wisdom.” It is evident, observes Justin, that “ no one can terrify or enslave those who have believed in Jesus ; for when condemned to be beheaded, to be crucified, to be cast to wild beasts, into chains, or into the flames, or to be otherwise tortured, they never swerve from the profession of their faith.” The steadfastness of the Christians to

their belief passed into a proverb. “Sooner might one unteach the disciples of Moses and Christ,” observes the celebrated physician Galen, A.D. 180. “There are those,” says Tertullian, in his treatise *De Spectaculis*, “who think the Christians, a people ever ready for death, are trained up to this obstinacy by the renouncement of pleasures, so that they may the more easily despise life, having, as it were, cut its bonds asunder; and may not pine after that which they have already rendered superfluous to themselves; that so this rule may be thought to be laid down rather by man’s wisdom and provision, than by the law of God.” The same writer again alludes to this quality of the early Christians in a noble passage at the conclusion of his *Apology*.—“That which you reproach in us as obstinacy has been the most instructing mistress in proselyting the world; for who has not been struck at the sight of that you call obstinacy, and thence excited to look into the reality and reason of it? And whoever examined well into our religion, but came over to it; and whoever



was converted but was ready to suffer for it, to purchase the favour of God, and obtain the pardon of all his sins, though at the price of his blood, martyrdom being sure of mercy? For this reason it is we thank you for condemning us, because there is such a blessed emulation and discord between the divine and human judgment, that, when you condemn us upon earth, God absolves us in heaven."

46. The rescript of Trajan, not less mischievous because it recommended in one respect a moderate course, converted the tacit oppression of the Christians under the legal forms applicable to those who contemned the religion of the state, to a direct condemnation of them by express decree. Under the sanction of this high authority, the rancour of the populace increased, and in the next reign, that of Hadrian, A. D. 117 to A. D. 138, they began to demand the sacrifice of the Christians at the pagan festivals. Their hostility to them had reached to such a pitch of intensity, that it seems in some cases persons who were not Christians were condemned on the mere

suspicion of their having accepted the tenets of the new creed. In this state of affairs, Serenius Granianus, proconsul of Asia Minor, wrote to the emperor suggesting the unfairness of the Christians being indiscriminately executed, without trial, to gratify the clamour of the people. The rescript of Hadrian, addressed to his successor, is preserved by Eusebius, and is of unquestionable authenticity, being expressly referred to, not only by Melito, in the Apology addressed to Marcus Antoninus, A.D. 177, but by Justin Martyr and Sulpicius Severus. It is in the following terms,—“ Hadrian to Minucius Fundanus. I have received a letter written to me by the illustrious Serenius Granianus, whom you have succeeded. It seems then to me that this is an affair which ought not to be passed over without being examined into ; if it were only to prevent disturbance being given to the people, and that room may not be left for informers to practise their wicked arts. If, therefore, the people of the province will appear publicly, and in a legal way charge the Christians that they may answer for them-

selves in court, let them take that course, and not proceed by importunate demands and loud clamours only. For it is much the best method, if any bring accusations, that you should take cognizance of them. If then any one shall accuse and make out anything contrary to the laws, do you determine according to the nature of the crime; but, by Hercules, if the charge be only a calumny (compare Matthew, v. 11), do you take care to punish the author of it with the severity it deserves." Similar rescripts (Euseb. Hist. Eccles. iv. 26) were sent by the emperor to the rulers of other provinces; but notwithstanding the apparent fairness of these orders, it appears from the Samaritan Chronicle that, in A.D. 132, large numbers of Christians were executed in Egypt by the order of Hadrian. The persecutions of the Christians continued, with various degrees of intensity, during the greater part of this century.

47. The fortitude displayed by the early Christians under their torments elicited the astonishment even of their enemies. It pervaded all the true members of the new faith.

Tender children and helpless women surrendered themselves to martyrdom with a courage and a patience under suffering that exceeded the brightest examples of the ancient stoics, and that could only have been obtained by the exercise of a sincere faith. “Is it possible,” asks the philosopher Epictetus, A.D. 120, “that a man may arrive at this temper, and become indifferent to these things, from madness or from habit, as the Galilæans?” There is a singular passage in the *Meditations* of the emperor Marcus Antoninus, composed before the year 175, expressly condemning this readiness of the Christians to die rather than consent to the relinquishment of their creed, —“What a soul is that which is prepared, even now presently if needful, to be separated from the body, whether it be to be extinguished, or to be dispersed, or to subsist still; but this readiness must proceed from a well weighed judgment, not from mere obstinacy, like the Christians; and it should be done considerately, and with gravity, without tragical exclamations, and so as to persuade another.” Long before this was written, Pliny

had asserted that no persuasion or force could compel real Christians to acknowledge their tenets were erroneous. Some of the torments to which they were subjected were almost incredible. Those who stood around them, observe the members of the church at Smyrna, writing to others at Philadelphia, “ were astonished, seeing them scourged till their veins and arteries were laid bare, and even their entrails became visible; after which they were laid upon the shells of sea-fish, and upon sharp spikes, fixed in the ground, with many other kinds of torture; in the end they were cast to wild beasts to be devoured by them. One Germanicus, assisted by the divine grace, overcame the fear of death implanted in the nature of men; for when the proconsul advised him to think of his youth, and to spare himself, he was not at all moved thereby, but enticed and stimulated the wild beasts to approach him, that he might be the sooner dismissed from this evil world.” All writers, heathen as well as Christian, agree in asserting that the sincere followers of the new religion endured any degree of suffering, and laid down

their lives, rather than even nominally deny their Saviour before the world.

48. The Christians, when detected, sometimes escaped with the infliction of imprisonment, which was, however, often accompanied with various degrees of severity. This modification of the punishment originally inflicted was more common in the latter part of the second century, than at previous times. In the narrative of the death of Peregrinus, written by an elegant Greek author, Lucian of Samosata, is preserved an interesting account of the Christians of that period, and of the efforts they made to relieve the necessities of any members of the body who were imprisoned on account of the faith,—“ at this time it was that Peregrinus learnt the wonderful philosophy of the Christians, having kept company with their priests and scribes in Palestine. They still worship that great man who was crucified in that country, because he introduced this new worship into life. For this, then, he was seized and thrown into prison. When he was put in prison, the Christians, looking upon it as a misfortune,

moved everything in their endeavours to rescue him; but when this was impossible, every other kind of attention was shown to him, not leisurely, but with all their zeal. At early dawn, might be seen waiting about the prison, old women, certain widows, and orphan children; but those of them who were in authority, also, corrupting the guards, slept in the prison with him. Then elegant suppers were carried in for him, and they held there their sacred conversations, and the good Peregrinus, as he was called, was named by them a new Socrates. Moreover, there came to him persons from some of the cities of Asia, sent by the Christians to assist him out of their common stock, to join in advising him, and to comfort the man. It is incredible what expedition they use when any of their friends are known to be in trouble. In a word, they spare nothing upon such an occasion;—for these miserable men have no doubt they shall be immortal and live for ever; therefore they condemn death, and many surrender themselves to sufferings. Moreover, their first lawgiver has taught them that they

are all brethren, when once they have turned and renounced the gods of the Greeks, and worship this Master of theirs who was crucified, and engage to live according to his laws. They have also a sovereign contempt for all the things of this world, and look upon them as common." This valuable notice of the Christians, written by Lucian of Samosata, a heathen author of the second century, refers to a period somewhere about A. D. 160. Another notice of the imprisonment of those detected of belonging to the new sect occurs in a curious anecdote related by Justin,—“a woman, being converted to Christianity, was afraid to associate with a reprobate husband, lest she should partake of his sins. Her husband, not being able to accuse her, vented his rage on one Ptolemæus, a teacher of Christianity, who had converted her. The centurion threw Ptolemæus into prison, and was afterwards persuaded to bring him forth, and to put the usual question to him, whether he were a Christian or not? Then, upon his true and faithful confession that he was one, the centurion caused him to be fettered,



and he was punished in prison for a long time." That Christianity would necessitate in some cases family divisions was foretold (Matthew, x. 36) by Jesus himself.

49. Persecution had from the first assisted rather than retarded the dissemination of the faith. According to the irrefragable testimony of the historian Tacitus, the new religion had made extraordinary progress within thirty years after the crucifixion. It had only been checked for a short time in its progress by that event, and then spread not only over Judea, but to the seat of the Roman government, so that in A.D. 64, the date of the great fire at Rome, a "vast multitude" had been discovered in that city. The evidence of Pliny, which is also unassailable by adverse criticism, establishes that the Christian faith was undergoing persecution more than twenty years before the period at which he wrote his celebrated letter to Trajan, so that about A.D. 85, or in little more than twenty years after the cruelties inflicted on the Christians at Rome, the process of repression is discovered in opera-

tion in a remote part of the empire; and notwithstanding a few interested later testimonies to the contrary, it is doubtful if the system ceased entirely at any period in the latter half of the first century, excepting possibly during the short reign of Nerva. At some period before A.D. 107, according to Pliny, the progress of the new faith had been so successful, the temples of the gods "were once almost deserted," and the sacred solemnities, at the date of his letter, were merely being revived "after a long intermission." Great numbers, he says with symptoms of alarm, "must be involved in the danger of these prosecutions, which have already extended, and are still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes." It thus appears that persons of "all ranks" were now accepting the tenets of Christianity, which were no longer chiefly restricted, as in the earlier dissemination of the religion, to individuals of lowly temporal condition. The notices of its advancement after this period are too numerous to be here particularised. They

prove that the faith was spreading year after year, gathering strength and vitality in its progress. It was established as early as the middle of the second century at Edessa, where the prince, Abgar Bar Manu, held the Christian Bardesanes in high respect. In Africa it had made such progress that Tertullian remarks, if the Christians were extirpated, they would decimate Carthage. In another place, he observes,—“we are but of yesterday, and by to-day are grown up, and overspread your empire; your cities, your islands, and your very camps, all swarm with Christians; your temples indeed we leave to yourselves, and they are the only places you can name without Christians.” To a similar effect is the following observation by Justin Martyr, who is speaking perhaps somewhat hyperbolically, but no doubt with a conviction of the truth of the main fact of the wide reception of the religion,—“there is not so much as one nation of men, whether Greeks or Barbarians, or by what other names soever they are called, whether Scythians or Arabians, amongst whom prayers and thanksgivings are

not offered up to the Father and Creator of all things through the name of Jesus who was crucified," Tryph. Dial. 117. There were Christian churches at Lyons and Vienne soon after A.D. 150, and before the conclusion of the same century, according to several early writers, the faith had penetrated to some of the native tribes of the British Islands, at so early a period was the establishment, in some form, of that missionary system which now, by the aid of its marvellous ramifications, permeates nearly every country on the face of the globe.

50. In speaking of the efforts made by the heathens to suppress the advance of Christianity, attention has only hitherto been drawn to the agencies of the law and the sword. Some consideration may now be given to the equally important action of the pen, the aid of which was not, however, invoked against the new religion until the second century. In a discussion respecting the truth of any particular history, one of the best tests is to be sought for in the insufficiency of the arguments of those who con-

tend for the falsity of the narrative. It will then obviously be a matter of interest and importance to ascertain what kind of reasoning was employed by the professed opponents of Christianity. The Epicurean philosopher, Celsus, is one of the most ancient writers of this class, and as he may fairly be considered the ablest of the early authors who publicly attacked the new religion, the character of the testimony he adduces will be examined with more than ordinary curiosity, if not at first by some with anxiety. Any feeling of apprehension that he possessed evidence of value beyond the refutation of Christians would, however, be dissipated on a perusal of the remaining fragments of his treatise. At the time at which Celsus wrote, soon after the middle of the second century, it was not too late to have appealed to secondary evidence, to some of those who had been acquainted with the witnesses of the miracles of Christ; or, at all events, he could have searched the records of the city of Rome, sought for the accounts of his own countrymen, and referred to the reports sent to the

seat of government from the various procurators, in support of his statements against the veracity of the evangelists. But far from attempting to deny that the Saviour worked extraordinary and important miracles, he tacitly admits their occurrence, but attributes them to the employment of magical or juggling arts, which he asserts were learnt by him during his abode in Egypt. "Jesus," observes Celsus, "having been privately educated, was compelled to work in Egypt, and having learnt those arts for which that nation is so famous, returned into his own country, and gave out that he was God." He asks if a person who performed such miracles is not rather "a wretch, well-versed, it seems, in a diabolical art." The fact of chief importance is, however, that Celsus had no good evidence to produce in opposition to the various miracles performed by Christ during his life-time; and it must be recollected that nothing could have been so difficult to establish, or so easy to confute, as most of the works of supernatural power ascribed to the Saviour. Celsus, in fact, restricts himself

to the denial of the truth of those events which were, even in his time, beyond the possibility of demonstration, without attempting to prove the falsity of those still within the range of critical enquiry. It would be difficult to name a fact in defence of the Christian religion more suggestive than this.

51. Independently of the value of the treatise of Celsus in showing that, in his time, the accounts in our present gospels were those received by the Christians, there are numerous incidental confirmations of the evangelical narrative. Thus he admits that the Saviour, "appearing in the world, and introducing his doctrines but a few years ago, was taken by the Christians for the Son of God, in a strict and proper sense." He reproaches Christ as having been "born at an obscure village," and having "a mother who got her livelihood by going out to service, her husband being a carpenter by trade." Celsus acknowledges that the Saviour was baptized by John the Baptist; that he wandered about with his disciples without means of subsistence, and without a settled habita-

tion; that he foretold his own death and resurrection; that he was betrayed by one of his own followers; and that he was executed on the cross, which, he adds, “was certainly the most shameful, as well as painful, death he could possibly have suffered.” In another place he says, speaking in the character of a Jew addressing the Christians, — “it was but the other day we severely punished the person who led you aside, like a company of silly sheep, and, by consequence, it was very lately, and on a sudden, you renounced the law of your fathers.” Celsus questions the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, but he grounds his objection on the insufficient number of witnesses, observing that Christians only were present on the occasion. He does not attempt to deny that the fact of the resurrection was publicly stated on the authority of those witnesses; but, on the contrary, he expressly objects that there were so many present at the crucifixion of the Saviour, and so few at the time that he rose from the dead. It is unnecessary to enlarge on the importance of a concession of this kind, yielded by a bitter philosophical opponent.



52. The preternatural humility of Jesus was, as might have been expected, altogether beyond the appreciation of the heathen philosopher. Celsus speaks, in contempt, of “the Sun of Righteousness, who condescends to shine promiscuously on the greatest and on the meanest, and to enlighten, and warm with his refreshing rays, the most eminent saint and the vilest sinner.” Thus the liberal universality of the Christian religion, that which recommends it as the revelation of an omnipresent God, becomes, in the mind of the Epicurean, an argument against its divine origin. In another chapter, he writes in these contemptuous terms of the Virgin Mary,—“one who had neither a great fortune, nor noble birth, to recommend her; but led so obscure a life, she was scarce known by those who were her nearest neighbours;” and again, the Jew of Celsus, addressing the Saviour, says,—“you were compelled to wander about like a slave and a vagabond, and to sneak like a malefactor, not having a place whereon you may comfortably rest your head.” It was naturally a subject

for wonder to a philosophical mind, that the Messiah should appear in the world as one of the poorest and least influential of mankind.

53. A similar kind of feeling and train of thought induces Celsus to question the divine nature of the Saviour, on the specious ground that he did not on all occasions exercise the power with which such a being must have been invested, that circumstances and trials were allowed that could easily have been prevented; and that he was endowed with attributes inconsistent with the majesty of divine power. The Jew introduced by Celsus asks,—“what necessity was there, when you were an infant, you should be carried into Egypt to avoid being killed; for could not God, who, as we are told, did employ his angels for your direction and assistance, preserve his Son as easily in Judea as in Egypt?” Again, observes Celsus, “a God would never have a human body, that is so contemptible as being liable to so many and so considerable imperfections; a God had no need of such a voice, nor such methods of persuasion.” He follows with other arguments conceived in a

similar spirit,—“ if your Saviour suffered freely, in obedience to his Heavenly Father, it is plain, since you say that he was God, and his sufferings were entirely voluntary, you must acknowledge it was impossible, in the midst of his supposed agonies, that he should have had so quick a sense of pain. Why did he then make such horrible complaints, and so earnestly desire his sufferings might be prevented?—As the sun, enlightening everything by its piercing rays, does immediately discover itself to us by the piercing light which it transmits over the whole sphere; so your Saviour, had he been God, or the Son of God, would have resembled that glorious luminary.—What did Jesus do that was truly great, and worthy of a God? Did he baffle his enemies, and disconcert their most politic measures? Had he a mind to have given a proof of his pretended divinity, one would think he should have vanished the very moment he was nailed to the cross.” In all this, there is merely the human judgment of what revelation ought to be, set up in opposition to that which is be-

lieved by Christians to be the design of God. There is not, in any part of the fragments of Celsus, any valid evidence against the truth of Christianity, or of the Christian revelation.

54. The insinuation of Celsus that the miracles of the Saviour were effected by the agency of magic, or were deceptions executed in the same manner as were those performed by the ancient professors of that art, is alluded to by several other writers. Justin Martyr refers to this notion in an interesting passage in which he observes,—“ this Christ, the fountain of living water, flowed out from God in the wilderness that was destitute of the knowledge of God, namely, in the land of the Gentiles ; who also appeared amongst your countrymen, and healed those who from their birth, and according to the flesh, were blind, and deaf, and lame ; causing, even by his word, the one to leap, the other to hear, and the other to see. Moreover he also raised the dead, and restored them to life again, and by his mighty works prevailed upon the men of those times to own and

acknowledge him. But some that saw him do those mighty works, said that he practised the magic art, and did not scruple to affirm that he was an impostor and a deceiver of the people," Dial. Tryph. 69. In another work, the Apology, he excuses himself from insisting as much as he would otherwise have done upon the miracles of Christ, because the adversaries of the religion were wont to attribute them to magic,—“lest any of our opponents should say, what hinders, but that he who is called Christ, being a man sprung from men, performed the miracles, which we attribute to him, by magical art.” So also Tertullian, to the same effect,—“that person, whom the Jews had vainly imagined, from the meanness of his appearance, to be a mere man, they afterwards, in consequence of the power he exerted, considered as a magician.” Porphyry was one of those who imputed the miracles of Christ to the employment of magic; and, in the Jewish Talmuds, it is stated that, after his return from Egypt, he engaged himself in magical practices, and was excommunicated. Ac-

cording to the same authority, there was a tradition that they executed Jesus on the day of the preparation of the Passover, a crier having gone before him forty days, making proclamation in these words,—“ he was led forth to be stoned, because he practised magical arts, and seduced and led away the Israelites.” In a stupid Hebrew romance, of uncertain antiquity, called *Tolledoth Jeshu*, the History of Jesus, the Saviour is said to have obtained his power of working miracles by having succeeded in obtaining at the temple the right pronounciation of the ineffable name of God, in spite of the efforts of two brazen lions who had successfully counteracted all previous attempts of a similar nature. These notices are merely valuable as showing the importance attached by the early adversaries of Christianity to the belief of the followers of the new religion in the miracles of the Saviour, and the necessity that existed of throwing discredit upon their probability.

55. There is no ancient writer against Christianity whose work is of the same im-

portance as is that of Celsus, or, in fact, of great value in the question respecting the evidences of the truth of the religion. Celsus did all that it was in the power of an acute philosopher to accomplish towards the demolition of the foundations of the Christian faith, and it is seen how insignificant is his effort, how deficient in corroborative testimony, how little more there is in his arguments beyond bare denial, ridicule, and unsupported slander, the weakest resources to which an adversary of acknowledged position and ability could have had recourse. Not only is Celsus the most ancient opponent of Christianity, any large portions of whose works remain, but there is no good evidence that there was any one before his time who made a similar attempt; though contemporary with him, and writing, as far as can be ascertained, at nearly the same time, were the Cynic philosopher Crescens, and the rhetorician Cornelius Fronto, who are only known as sceptical writers by a few detached passages. In the latter part of the same century, and in the following one,

several authors openly attacked the religion, but at a period when all direct and little secondary oral evidence of importance could have been available ; and it is not found that any of them were enabled to refer to authentic records in support of the opinions they were desirous of establishing. Many of their objections are of a frivolous character, the production of which is inconsistent with the possession of tangible arguments. Thus Porphyry accuses some of the apostles of folly for instantaneously complying with the command of the Saviour to forsake all and follow him ; he upbraids Jesus for fickleness, because he went to Jerusalem at the feast of Tabernacles after expressing another intention ; and he objects that there was an attempt at imposition by the evangelists, when the lake of Gennesareth is spoken of by them as being a sea. He did not deny all the Christian miracles, but attributed some of them to the exercise of demoniacal influence ; and he speaks of Jesus as “ a most wise and pious man, approved by the gods, and taken up into heaven for his distinguished virtues.”



In indignation at the spread of the religion, he observes,—“ people wonder that this distemper has oppressed the city so many years, *Æsculapius* and the other gods no longer conversing with men ; for since *Jesus* has been honoured, none have received any benefit from the gods.” Another opponent, named *Hierocles*, wrote two books against the Christians, in which he does not attempt to disprove the miracles of *Jesus*, but endeavours to show that similar works were performed by one *Apollonius*. Christ, he observes, “ must be reckoned a magician, because he did many wonderful things ; but *Apollonius* is more able, for when *Domitian* would have put him to death, he escaped ; whereas Christ was apprehended and crucified.” *Hierocles* speaks contemptuously of the apostles as “ ignorant and illiterate people, some of whom got their livelihood by fishing ;” so difficult was it for the pride of the human mind to reconcile itself to a revelation promulgated to the world in so humble a guise. A similar objection is made by the emperor *Julian*, who is also dissatisfied with the simple character

of the Christian miracles,—“ Jesus did nothing in his life-time worthy of remembrance, unless any one thinks it a mighty matter to heal lame and blind people, and exorcise demoniacs in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany.” In estimating the value of the works of the writers after the time of Celsus, and how far they unconsciously add to the credibility of the gospel history by the circumstances adduced in the vain endeavour to confute its truth, it should be observed that we labour under the disadvantage of being enabled to refer only to occasional passages extracted by other authors, the books themselves being lost; but this is the less to be regretted in respect to the present object, it being obvious any writings composed after the second century are of small importance in regard to most questions relating to events occurring in the life-time of the Saviour.

56. It will be observed that Celsus, representing the philosophical spirit of his time, deals chiefly with what may be termed the counter-internal evidences of Christianity; and that, like those who lead the popular

scepticism of the present day, takes exception, not to defects in the historical evidence, but rather to the doctrines of the religion, which are declared to be unworthy our intellectual assent, and repugnant to the cultivated mind. Metaphysical objections of this kind can never be completely answered, for there being a natural tendency in every mind to reduce the sympathies of God to its own level, it is a hopeless task to attempt to show that the revealed plans of divine administration are in unison with those that would suggest themselves naturally to the infinite varieties of the human mind, as what, in their estimation, the designs of the Creator ought to be. But there is one consideration, which appears to neutralize in a great measure all arguments founded on the circumstance of the tenets of a religion not being in accordance with the predilections of the human intellect, it being impossible to conceive that any religious doctrines, wholly acceptable to the natural judgment of man, could not also be of human invention. Great suspicion would thus be attached to any creed of a purely moral and philosophical

character,—to any that would fully meet the desires of those who consider that the doctrines of a true religion should be reconcileable to unassisted reason ; and one evidence of the truth of Christianity is the very high improbability that its peculiar tenets should have been inventions, and that the promulgators of the new creed should have voluntarily added to the great difficulties by which they were otherwise surrounded by attaching to it novel doctrines, so singular in their character, and so little adapted to obtain the favourable acceptance of mankind. It is not of course pretended that Christianity is true, merely because its tenets are mysterious, and accepted with difficulty by the human intellect ; but it is insisted that it is unlikely a communication from the Infinite to the Finite should not be accompanied with such difficulties and mysteries, and that the wisest and most philosophical method is first to be satisfied of the truth of a revelation from historical evidence, allowing the integrity of the doctrines themselves to rest solely on that truth, uninfluenced by any antecedent conjectures of our own of

what a revelation might or ought to consist.

57. The difficulties connected with the reception of the historical truth of Christianity, suggested by modern sceptics, are more tangible, and can be practically answered. Thus, the chief objection urged by Gibbon is the absence of notice of the miracles of Christ in the writings of the very few classical authors contemporary with those events. The subject has already been alluded to, but it deserves perhaps to be treated at somewhat greater length. Setting aside the not improbable assumption that mention of them was made in works of the period not now extant, a little consideration will show that there are causes satisfactorily accounting for the silence of a few heathen writers. There is no reason for supposing any of them to have been intimately acquainted with the local occurrences happening in Judea in the life-time of the Saviour, and the only means they could have possessed of learning of the miracles were rumours, disregarded perhaps in some cases as improbable, and those reports addressed to

the emperor by a procurator of a remote province, which came to be valuable evidence at a later date, but which at the time either failed to attract the serious notice they deserved amidst the multiplicity of the incidents of so vast an empire, or perhaps were studiously concealed for a time as involving circumstances dangerous to the maintenance of the existing national religion. The miracles of Christ were not, moreover, generally of a character so imposing as to attract the attention of the whole world. The various cures and other evidences of divine power were performed in the most unpretending manner in a distant country, Christ coming as it were in disguise to plant the seeds of faith in a number of witnesses only sufficient to secure their propagation. His ministry lasted but a short time, during which no classical writer had been in Judea, and the probability is that no accounts of him, excepting perhaps a few desultory notices in the correspondence of individuals, were sent to Rome previously to his condemnation by Pontius Pilate. The Romans, even at a later date, appear to have

been but very slightly acquainted with the tenets of the religion. The cruel persecution of the Christians in the reign of Nero, as recorded by Tacitus and Suetonius, shows how their character was misunderstood, any disposition to treat it fairly being overruled by the fear of the danger to which the ancient faith of Rome was subjected by the dissemination of the new creed. The hatred of the Romans to the latter, and a dread of the consequences resulting from its rapid advance, must have been nearly simultaneous with the arrival of the news of the wonders performed by Christ, a consideration alone sufficient to account for the silence or enmity of the classical authors. Tacitus in all probability knew something of the causes alleged for the foundation of the religion, yet he contents himself with indulging in the severest abuse of the converts, assuming them guilty of crimes inconsistent with the endurance of a martyrdom for the sake of the truth of a spiritual faith. Their real crime no doubt consisted in their defiance of polytheism, the denial of which was, in the opinion of many, synonymous with

“hatred to mankind,” the accusation brought against them by the historian. Within thirty years after the crucifixion, the agents of Christianity were undermining the foundations of the national religion of the Roman empire, exposing themselves to bitter persecution, and their faith to violent hatred. The truth of their creed rested on miracles and occurrences that had taken place in a distant province, and it was no less the interest than agreeable to the prejudices of every citizen who did not embrace the new faith, to conceal or deny the truth of any information respecting them that came to his knowledge. The most that can be expected, under such circumstances, is that the classical writers should, when incidentally mentioning the Christians, speak of them with dislike, bear testimony to the spread of the religion, and refrain from adducing supposititious evidence against the truth of events they would have been unwilling to admit,—even if it were possible any of them could have been eye-witnesses of the performance of a single miracle, or acquainted with those who could have borne



personal testimony to the fact. The incidental notices of Christianity in the works of Tacitus, Pliny, and others, attest, as far as they go, to the truth of the religion, without containing a single assertion bearing on the contrary side. It must always be remembered that it is impossible to expect strong confirmatory evidence to be recorded by unbelievers,—by those who were specially interested in distorting or concealing it. Independent testimony in favour of the truth of the evangelical narrative must obviously stop before it reaches that point at which assent enforces belief. Most of those who knew of their own knowledge that the truth of the religion rested on undeniable facts became believers, and their evidence is disregarded or impaired from the very circumstance of their being Christians. If, therefore, we restrict ourselves to the consideration of the writings of those who, to an imperfect knowledge of the subject, added a strong prejudice against the religion, it is unreasonable to expect more than what is already before us; or even, indeed, to have been surprised had there been far less ex-

trinsic corroborative evidence. The truth of this reflection will be more readily appreciated, if it be remembered how few and unimportant are the references to circumstances of general history to be traced in the numerous works of the early Christians. Both classes of authors were writing with different objects, and naturally only confirm each other by incidental allusions.

58. The early Christians not only defiantly neglected the polytheistic worship, but incurred the anger of its professors by an open denouncement of its falsity. There can be no doubt that the Romans very soon began to consider the new faith to be of an exceedingly dangerous tendency. Those who adopted with sincerity the tenets of Christianity, regarded the heathen gods in the light of evil demons, carrying their dislike of everything connected with these objects of worship to such an excess as to refuse to join in customs involving in the slightest degree the acknowledgment of paganism, even in cases where they were in themselves harmless. The worship of the gods pervaded, in various trifling observances,

so much of the ordinary everyday-life of the Romans, the Christians were compelled, by reason of their determination not to recognise it, to isolate themselves from the great body of the people. "We cannot vouchsafe," says Justin Martyr, "to worship with numerous victims, and garlands of flowers, the work of men's hands, for we know them to be senseless inanimate idols, and in nothing resembling the form of God. This we look upon not only as the highest pitch of human folly, but as the most injurious affront to the true God, who is a God of glory and form ineffable, thus to transfer his incommunicable name to such corruptible and helpless things as wood and stone. We who formerly adored any of those who pass among you for gods, now through Jesus Christ have them all in the greatest contempt, though at the utmost peril of our lives." These opinions are doubtless an exact reflection of those entertained by the earliest followers of the new religion, and it may easily be imagined that the Christians, holding sentiments of this kind, were regarded with fear by the government as a body of men, who

would subvert, if they could, the existing order of affairs; and with hatred by the people, as innovators despising the gods they worshipped, and openly rejecting with contempt their religious associations. With superstitious fanaticism, on the occasion of any public calamity, the populace thought that the gods were exhibiting a supernatural testimony of their anger against the new sect, and were calling on their followers to exterminate the impious body. “Faction,” observes Tertullian, “is a name belonging only to those who conspire in the hatred of the good and virtuous, who join together their cry against the blood of the innocent, sheltering their malice under the vain pretence that they are of opinion the Christians are the occasions of all the mischief in the world. If the Tiber overflows, or the Nile does not; if rain is withheld, or the earth quakes; if famine or pestilence stride through the country, the cry is,—Away with these Christians to the lion!” According to Augustine, it had become in his time a proverb,—“if there is no rain, lay the blame on the Christians.” Bearing in

mind the strong feeling of the Roman people against the new religion, and the anxiety felt on all sides to stifle it in its birth, it surely cannot be a matter of surprise that the heathen writers of the time should refrain from recording any circumstances within their knowledge likely either to offend the prejudices of their readers, or to assist in the slightest degree in establishing the truth of a faith so opposed to what they believed to be their dearest interests.

59. One of the most plausible objections to the historical truth of the gospel narrative is the silence of Josephus, and contemporary heathen writers, respecting the massacre of the infants at Bethlehem. This "obscure village," as it is described by the Epicurean philosopher Celsus (see p. 131), was a small place, unimportant except as the birth-place of the Saviour, and the number of children cruelly executed in and around Bethlehem must have been inconsiderable when viewed in comparison with the results of many other persecutions of the age and of Herod. The silence of the very few contemporary Roman

authors respecting the event is therefore not to be wondered at. Josephus might have been expected to have mentioned it, but he omits to record many other circumstances of equal or greater moment with which he must have been acquainted. Thus, for example, although writing specially the history of the Jews, he takes no notice of their banishment by Claudius, a fact recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and confirmed by the independent testimony of Suetonius. It remains, then, to ascertain if the narrative of the massacre is credible in itself, and consistent with the known character of Herod, enquiries satisfactorily answered by a reference to Josephus. To pass over many deeds of cruelty perpetrated by this ruler, the following account of one of the last acts of his life (as quoted in Lardner, i. 331), will be sufficient for the purpose. In his last sickness, a little before he died, he sent orders throughout Judea, requiring the presence of all the chief men of the nation at Jericho. His orders were obeyed, for they were enforced with no less penalty than that of death. When these men

were come to Jericho, he had them all shut up in the circus; and calling for his sister Salome, and her husband Alexas, he told them, “ My life is now but short ; I know the dispositions of the Jewish people, and nothing will please them more than my death. You have these men in your custody ; as soon as the breath is out of my body, and before my death can be known, do you let in the soldiers upon them and kill them. All Judea and every family will then, though unwillingly, mourn at my death.” Nay, Josephus says that “ with tears in his eyes he conjured them, by their love to him, and their fidelity to God, not to fail of doing him this honour ; and they promised they would not fail.” This order was not executed, but the narrative shows beyond dispute that the massacre of the innocents was an act perfectly in unison with the base cruelty of Herod. It is worthy of remark that Macrobius, a heathen author of the fourth century, erroneously notices the latter event in connexion with the execution by Herod of his own sons, two of whom he had ordered to be strangled. This writer

includes the following amongst other jests of Augustus,—“when he had heard that, among the children within two years of age whom Herod, king of the Jews, had commanded to be slain in Syria, his own son had been killed, he said, it is better to be Herod’s hog than his son;” in allusion, of course, to the Mosaic prohibition of the eating of swine’s flesh. Although Macrobius is rather a late author, he was not a Christian, and the probability is that the anecdote above related was derived from some more ancient source. It must at all events be considered a fair independent testimony that Herod’s massacre of the infants in Judea was admitted as a fact by the heathens of the fourth century.

60. It is curious that Herod’s apprehension respecting the coming of the Messiah, an anxiety to be referred to the anticipation of the supernatural development of an earthly not of a spiritual kingdom, should have been exhibited many years afterwards by the emperor Domitian, who reigned from A.D. 81 to A.D. 96. An account of this circumstance is given by Hegesippus, who wrote about



A. D. 170. "When Domitian," says Eusebius, "had issued his orders that the descendants of David should be slain; according to an ancient tradition, some of the heretics accused the descendants of Judas, as the brother of our Saviour according to the flesh, because they were of the family of David, and, as such, were also related to Christ." The words of Hegesippus, the more ancient authority, are as follows,—“There were yet living of the family of our Lord, the grandchildren of Judas, called the brother of our Lord, according to the flesh. These were reported as being of the family of David, and were brought before Domitian, for this emperor was as much alarmed at the appearance of Christ as Herod. He put the question whether they were of David's race, and they confessed that they were. He then asked them what property they had, and how much money they owed; and both of them answered, they had between them only nine thousand denarii (about £281), and this they had not in silver, but in the value of a piece of land containing only thirty-nine acres; from which they

raised their taxes and supported themselves by their own labour. Then they also began to show their hands, exhibiting the hardness of their bodies, and the callosity formed by incessant labour on their hands, as evidence of their own labour. When asked, also, respecting Christ and his kingdom, what was its nature, and when and where it was to appear, they replied that it was not a temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but celestial and angelic; that it would appear at the end of the world, when coming in glory he would judge the quick and the dead, and give to every one according to his works. Upon which Domitian, despising them, made no reply; but treating them with contempt, as simpletons, commanded them to be dismissed, and by a decree ordered the persecution to cease. Thus delivered, they ruled the churches, both as witnesses and relatives of the Lord. When peace was established, they continued living even to the time of Trajan." This anecdote confirms the probability of the narrative respecting Herod's fear of the advent of Christ, as related in the evangelical history.

61. Another objection is the absence in the few contemporary heathen writers of notice of the preternatural darkness which spread over all or part of the land of Judea at the crucifixion, and of the earthquake which happened at the same time. There is no classical author who enters at all minutely into the history of the Holy Land at that period, and there is no reason for supposing that the darkness extended beyond the limits of that country; some distinguished critics being of opinion it was restricted to the circuit of a few miles around Jerusalem. Josephus does not allude to it, but neither does St. John, and little is to be fairly deduced from the want of mention, in ancient works, of isolated facts; and least of all, from any omissions made by the Jewish historian, who, as has been observed, neglects to note so many striking incidents closely connected with the subject of his work. There is, however, clear evidence that an account of this miraculous darkness was preserved in the archives of Rome, and that the philosophers of the time doubted its truth,

because it was inconsistent with the laws of any known astronomical event. Tertullian, addressing the Romans, expressly refers to this, and boldly appeals to the public registers for a confirmation of his assertion that such an account was preserved amongst their own records. Some writers consider that the darkness at the time of the crucifixion is alluded to in a passage in the works of Phlegon, a Greek author, A.D. 138, who states that, “in the fourth year of the two-hundredth-and-second Olympiad, there was the greatest eclipse of the sun that was ever known, and such a darkness at the sixth hour of the day, that even the stars were seen in the sky;” and it is worthy of remark that, so early as the close of the second century, it was thought that Phlegon, and some other Greek authors who mention a great eclipse and earthquake as occurring about this period, referred to the event recorded in the gospels. This latter, however, is scarcely what can be termed an eclipse, the duration of the obscurity having been too long for such an interpretation to be accepted; but heathen writers, not

knowing all the circumstances, might very possibly have assumed that it was occasioned by natural causes. The probability seems to be that a darkness of uncertain intensity spread over Judea for three hours. The expression of St. Luke that the "sun was darkened" is merely figurative, as in Rev. ix. 2; and it has been suggested that a passage in St. John, xix. 26, shows that the gloom described by the other evangelists was not an absolute deficiency of light. Be this as it may, there is no denial of the truth of the phenomenon by any contemporary writer, and it is as much as can be expected to find it was recorded in the archives of a people who were unwilling witnesses of any facts tending to aid the credibility of the Christian religion. The assertion of Tertullian in respect to the record of this important event is of great value, "at the same moment the light of mid-day was withdrawn, the sun veiling his orb; they, who knew not that this also had been foretold concerning Christ, thought it forsooth an eclipse; when they discovered not its cause, they denied it; and

yet you have this event, that befel the world, related in your own records (et tamen eum mundi casum relatum *in archivis vestris* habetis)." In some copies, the word *archivis* is altered to *arcanis*, which latter reading has been supposed, but on very unsatisfactory grounds, to refer to the Sibylline oracles, and is disingenuously adopted by Gibbon as if there were no doubt of its accuracy; yet not only do Huet, Grotius, and other men of great learning, accept the other lection, and interpret the words of Tertullian in the sense here assigned to them, but the same reading, *archivis*, is found in a manuscript of the twelfth century preserved in the library at Gotha, as well as in other manuscripts, and in nearly if not quite all the printed editions of the sixteenth century, which latter were probably taken from copies of good authority. It must be remembered that this is not the only passage in which Tertullian boldly refers to the evidences of the truth of the Christian narrative preserved in his time at Rome, where, there is no doubt, copies at least, if not the originals, of the authentic Acts of

Pilate were in existence. After the account of the darkness at the crucifixion, he observes, —“ Christ then being taken down from the cross, and laid in a sepulchre, the Jews beset it round with a strong guard of soldiers, fore-arming them with the strictest caution that his disciples should not come and steal away the body secretly, because he had foretold he would rise again from the dead on the third day. But on the third day a sudden earthquake arose, and the huge stone was rolled from the mouth of the sepulchre, the guards being struck with fear and confusion, not one disciple appearing on the occasion, and nothing found therein but the linen in which he was buried. Nevertheless, the chief priests, whose interest it was to set such a wicked falsehood on foot, in order to reclaim the people from a faith which must end in the utter ruin of their incomes and authority, gave out that his disciples came privily and stole him away. After the resurrection, Christ did not think fit to make a public entry among the people, because he would not forcibly redeem such obstinate persons from

error, and because a faith proposing infinite rewards should labour under some difficulties, that believing might be a virtue and not a necessity. But with some of his disciples he did eat and drink forty days in Galilee, a province of Judea, instructing them in all they should teach; and then, having ordained them to the office of preaching, he was parted from them by a cloud, and so received up before them into heaven. Pilate sent Tiberius an account of all these proceedings relating to Christ." A similar reference to evidences in the hands of the Romans occurs in Lucian's *Apology*,—"look into your own annals, and there you will find that, in the time of Pilate, when Christ suffered, the sun was obscured, and the light of the day was interrupted with darkness."

62. In both instances of the references to original documents in the foregoing extracts, Tertullian probably alludes to the *Acts of Pilate*, but, whether this be the case or not, he undoubtedly appeals to the public records for a general verification of his statements. Attempts have been made to neutralize the



value of this testimony, but on no sufficient grounds. At the same time, it is difficult to say which opinion is the most favourable to an argument in defence of the Christian religion. The supposition is a highly improbable one, but if no such Acts or records ever existed, and if Pontius Pilate did not transmit to the emperor Tiberius any information respecting the history of the Saviour, the chief objections of Gibbon are rendered nugatory ; for otherwise it is unlikely that the few Roman historians of the period could have obtained decided and authentic intelligence on the subject, or in fact any precise information excepting from those whose evidence would be received with suspicion,—the first converts at Rome. Gibbon, with an ill-concealed irony, observes that Pliny omits all reference to the darkness at the Passion, while he fails not to describe the singular defect of light which followed the murder of Cæsar. But the cases are not parallel; the latter phenomenon being connected with the history and political feeling of his own country, and well known to the Italian public; whereas

the obscurity at the crucifixion happened at a distance, and, even if reported to Pliny on trustworthy testimony, might either have been received with suspicion, or rejected from his work on grounds of policy, as bearing evidence to the truth of a religion the progress of which had already excited the alarm of the government. If Pilate sent an account of this event to Tiberius, together with notices of other matters relating to Jesus, it is impossible to assert that there may not have existed political reasons for the temporary concealment of the Acts in which they were narrated; or, to hazard another conjecture, neither is it unlikely that, amidst the multiplicity of similar reports, these testimonies remained unregarded until the dissemination of the Christian religion rendered them of interest and value. Of the fact that there were public documents at Rome in the second century, containing verifications of certain events in the history of the Saviour, there can exist as little reasonable doubt as there is none of the fact that such records were openly appealed to as authentic.

63. The statement made by Gibbon respecting the silence of heathen writers in regard to the preternatural darkness at the death of Christ, is distinguished by the exaggeration and want of candour pervading nearly all his observations on the rise and progress of Christianity. His words, in the passage above alluded to, are,—“a distinct chapter of Pliny is devoted to eclipses of an extraordinary nature, and unusual duration; but he contents himself with describing the singular defect of light which followed the murder of Cæsar, when, during the greatest part of a year, the orb of the sun appeared pale and without splendour.” The interpretation naturally given to this assertion would be, that Pliny had endeavoured to exhaust the subject of extraordinary eclipses, omitting all reference to the miraculous obscurity described in the gospels; but so far from this being the case, the entire chapter, besides not treating solely on eclipses, consists only of four lines, a few words in which casually allude to two examples of a long-continued gloom. Neither Seneca nor Pliny could have

been in Judea at the time of the crucifixion ; and the entire of Gibbon's argument, drawn from an absence of notice of any particular event in the works of such authors, wholly fails on examination. They omit to mention even some of the most remarkable phenomena connected with the history of their own country, an observation which applies to nearly all other ancient writers. If such omission of references were constituted a valid species of reasoning, numerous indeed would be the events in history the credibility of which could be successfully assailed.

64. The rest of the principal objections against the truth of the evangelical narrative are those connected with chronological and other discussions involving arguments of so subtle and learned a character, and depending so greatly on the results of textual criticism, it would be difficult to represent them fairly without entering into particulars uninteresting at least, if not unintelligible, to the general reader ; nor am I sure that it would be in my power to unravel the exact meaning of much of the learned annotation bestowed on

these questions. It must be remembered not only that it is impossible for any but the most advanced scholars to appreciate the precise extent of the difficulties occasioned by certain discrepancies observed in the text of the New Testament as at present received, but that all verbal criticism respecting that text is still in its infancy. This is said without prejudice to any religious theory, and is equally applicable whether we are the advocates of the plenary, or merely of the essential, inspiration of the scriptures; for whichever opinion be accepted, it is impossible for any one, acquainted with the manner in which the books of the New Testament have been transmitted to the present times, to believe that any known text is absolutely in the exact state in which it emanated from the inspired authors, or to assert that the rules of criticism, in respect to the authenticity of the text, are not in a great degree as applicable to the Bible as to any other volume belonging to the ages of antiquity. We may feel a moral conviction that all the essential truths of religion are preserved in the present copies of the sacred

writings, for it is extremely improbable that salvation should ever at any period have been allowed to depend upon the refined discussions of verbal criticism; but still this consideration does not preclude the important fact that the text of the scriptures is a legitimate subject for careful investigation by the aid of all the means which modern research and learning have unfolded. It is not improbable that, by degrees, every kind of difficulty, of the nature above referred to, will be ultimately removed by the assistance of this kind of criticism; and that a text of higher antiquity than any yet discovered may still be found, which may materially influence all discussions on the subject, at the same time that the fidelity of the received versions, in essential particulars, will, in all probability, be confirmed.

65. The supposed discrepancies above alluded to are overbalanced by the numerous confirmations of facts and allusions in the New Testament discovered in the works of independent authors, which have been diligently collected by Lardner and others. They

prove satisfactorily that the principal circumstances narrated in the gospels are consistent with the state of Judea in the life of Christ, and with the usages of the Hebrews and other nations before the destruction of Jerusalem. These instances of conformity between the statements of the evangelists, and the customs of the period, are not only found in the more obvious allusions, but in particulars that might have been considered to be the most unlikely to be paralleled by other examples. It is difficult to make a selection, but most readers would perhaps be of opinion that the probable truth of the history of the mock coronation of the Saviour would be one of those circumstances the most unlikely to be confirmed by a contemporary narrative bearing resemblance to it; and, on that account, the present illustration may be restricted to the consideration of that event. In A. D. 37 or 38, early in the reign of Caligula, a person named Carabas was similarly treated at Alexandria, the object of the people being to exhibit their dislike to Agrippa, to whom the Roman Emperor had given the tetrarchy of part of

Herod's dominions, with the right of wearing a diadem or crown. The story is thus related by Philo, a philosopher of Alexandria, who wrote towards the close of the first century, —“ this wretch Carabas they brought into the theatre, and placed him on a lofty seat that he might be conspicuous to all; then they put a thing made of paper on his head for a crown, the rest of his body they covered with a mat instead of a robe, and for a sceptre one put into his hand a little piece of a reed which he had just taken up from the ground. Having thus given him a mimic royal dress, several young fellows with poles on their shoulders came and stood on each side of him as his guards. Then there came people toward him, some to pay their homage to him, others to ask justice of him, and some to know his will and pleasure concerning affairs of state; and in the crowd were loud and confused acclamations of *Maris, Maris*; that being, as they say, the Syriac word for Lord, thereby intimating whom they intended to ridicule by all this mock show; Agrippa being a Syrian, and king of a large country



in Syria." Philo here speaks of Judea as a part of Syria.

66. The subject of conformities of this description might be continued at great length, but as the evidence merely extends to showing the probability of the early composition of the Gospels, respecting which there can exist no reasonable doubt, a more extended notice of them may here be deemed unnecessary. Neither would it be consistent with the design of this work, which has reference chiefly to the external historical evidences of Christianity, to enter at length into what would naturally form the next subject, the internal evidences of the truth of the evangelical narrative, which must be striking even to a prejudiced reader, and which would of themselves require a large volume, if considered with the attention they must be acknowledged to deserve. Amongst these vindications of truth may, however, be briefly noticed the candour with which the writers record the weaknesses and errors of members of their own faith, the simplicity and truthful character of their narrative, the unhesitating

manner in which they notice circumstances tending to degrade the religion in the estimation of worldly men, the impartiality with which they mention the objections of their adversaries, and, above all, the enunciation of a pure spiritual faith, and a perfection of morality far beyond the imagination of the founders of any previous school of ethics or philosophy. These constitute, in the whole, a very powerful argument in favour of the reception of the authenticity of the gospels as compositions by immediate followers of the Saviour.

67. In addition to these evidences, there is the testimony of prophecy, which consists in the exact application of a number of passages in the Old Testament, known to have been written by the prophets many ages before the birth of Christ, to events which occurred in the life of the Saviour. This subject is so important, and could be followed out to so great an extent by careful and learned investigation, I altogether distrust my ability to do even slight justice to it; and will, therefore, be contented to refer to perhaps the

earliest collection of such texts, which occurs in the following chapter of Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians, written towards the close of the first century ;—" For Christ is theirs who are humble, and not who exalt themselves over his flock. The sceptre of the Majesty of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, came not in the show of pride, and arrogance, though he could have done so, but with humility, as the Holy Ghost had before spoken concerning him. For thus he saith, ' Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. He hath no form nor comeliness ; and, when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men : a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from him : he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions ; he was

bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many: for he shall

bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.' And again he himself saith, 'I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out their lips; they shake their head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.' Ye see, beloved, what the pattern is that has been given to us. For, if the Lord thus humbled himself, what should we do who are brought by him under the yoke of his grace?" There were other prophecies, not found in the Bible, alleged by some of the early Christians to apply to the Saviour, but as it was well recommended by Augustine, A. D. 395,—“it is much better to insist only upon the prophecies of the Old Testament, which the Jews our enemies receive; they are now dispersed all over the earth, and they

bear witness that the prophecies concerning Christ, therein contained, have not been forged by us." In another place, he calls the Jews the librarians of the Christians, and compares them to persons carrying the bags of evidences ready for production in a court of justice.

68. The truthful character of the mission of the Saviour, in respect to his own revelation to the world, exclusive of the fulfilment of the references in the Old Testament, rests slightly upon prophecy; but there is one, the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem, which deserves special consideration. If the truth of the Gospel narrative be not admitted, it must be allowed that there is no certain evidence that this prophecy was uttered or recorded before the circumstance took place. There is the strong negative argument that there is no reason for supposing the early Christians to have used other and different histories of the founder of their creed. It is in the highest degree improbable, if the prophecy had not appeared until after the event, or if the case had been at all doubtful, that some of the early opponents of Christianity

would not have seized with avidity on a powerful argument, the truth of which could have been tested at least as late as the time of Celsus. Such an argument would have been alluded to in a reply, even if the attack itself were lost. It may yet be questioned whether, if we succeeded in proving with legal exactness the priority of the record to the fall of Jerusalem, a sceptic would consider the truth of the religion thus proved. It might be thought to strengthen other arguments, without being considered in itself conclusive. The object of the prophecy was perhaps rather to save the valuable congregation of the Jerusalem church in its infancy, than to furnish a testimony to the faith, the truth of which fortunately does not depend on our being enabled to demonstrate the genuineness of this prediction. It will be sufficient for any one, impressed with the strong evidences in favour of the general truth of the gospel history, to know that there exists no reason to question the correctness of the statements made by the evangelists respecting it, and that the evidence upon which its truth rests would be

readily accepted by all, did that evidence refer to any ordinary event in history. An adversary who insists upon the normal improbability of the truth of any miracle or divine prophecy, will not be satisfied even with the production of much stronger testimony. He can still question and doubt the validity of any written evidence appertaining to the times of the ancients, when weighed in the balance against the remote possibility of deception.

69. There is yet another kind of evidence, one which is peculiar to Christianity. It is restricted to the communication of individual experiences, but it rests on so large a number of strong testimonies, that it may be reasonably accepted by some minds as confirmatory of the truth of the religion, although no reliance is here placed upon it as an essential argument. I refer to the numerous instances related of persons having been, in spite of themselves and the resisting power of the worldly tendencies of their minds, irresistibly drawn by some indescribable attraction to the foot of the Cross. It seems as if there were



an invisible power acting on the unconverted soul which claims it for its own, in apparent contradiction to the direction of the will. Yet this opposition may be only imaginary, and it may be that, in all such cases, the religious feeling has ever been present, though obscured or depressed for a while by other tendencies or external influences. Be this as it may, it seems evident that Christianity offers the most congenial field for the development of strong religious sentiment. Preternatural conversions have been usual from the earliest ages of the faith up to the present time. Many people, observes Origen, "have, as it were against their wills, been brought over to Christianity by the Holy Spirit giving a sudden turn to their minds, and offering visions to them by day or by night; so that, instead of hating the word, they became ready even to lay down their lives for it." Tertullian, in the second century, bears similar testimony; nor is the agency of visions, though of course they are easily (perhaps not always truly) referred to a disordered imagination, to be dismissed as

altogether impossible. The experience of the present day confirms that of Origen and Tertullian; and is one of the more subtle evidences of the truth of the religion. Some hypocritical assertions of this kind there may be, but the number of well-attested nearly instantaneous conversions, taking place under circumstances where the attribution of worldly motives cannot be sustained, is too great for us fairly to question the fact that such spiritual changes do occasionally happen.

70. Scarcely any of the evidences previously mentioned, now insisted upon for the establishment of the truth of Christianity, with the exception of those derived from the ancient Jewish prophecies, are prominently introduced in the Christian writings of the first and second centuries. No systematic defence of the religion against the attacks of the philosophers appears to have been thought necessary at that early period, the numerous Apologies, which were issued in the second century, having been generally compiled for the purpose of explaining the innocence and lawfulness of the new faith to the Roman

emperors and people, with a view of mitigating the persecution carried on against it. Hence it is that these works only incidentally contribute to the evidences of the religion. When their authors approach the subject of doctrine, they assume the truth of the miracles, and concern themselves more with interpreting the relations of the Prophecies to those phenomena, than with entering into a discussion on the evidences of the latter. In the instances, however, in which they refer to the truth of the miracles accompanying the appearance of the Messiah, their testimony is decisive. The earliest Apologist whose name has been recorded is Quadratus, A.D. 120, the only fragment of whose works now remaining is the remarkable passage respecting the works of the Saviour, already quoted at p. 41. About the same time appeared the second work of this class, the *Apology of Aristides*, a Greek writer, who retained the philosopher's cloak after his acceptance of Christianity, in order that he might have greater influence in converting the educated heathens. He was an eloquent

philosopher of Athens, and his *Apology* was dedicated to the emperor Hadrian. The work itself is lost, and the only remnant of it that has been discovered is a short passage in which is mentioned the martyrdom of Dionysius the Areopagite, “after a noble confession of the faith, and the most severe kinds of torture.” The earliest *Apologies* now preserved are those of Justin Martyr, one addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius, and the other to Marcus Aurelius. To these follow the *Oration of Tatian of Assyria*, a disciple of the former writer, through whose influence he was converted to Christianity. It is an obscurely written work, and contains little to the purposes of this treatise. The *Apology of Athenagoras*, addressed to the emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus, is a far more interesting and important production. It was written about the year 180. About the same time appeared the defences of Melito, Claudius Apollinaris, Miltiades, Theophilus, and others. It is unnecessary to enter here into the history and character of these works, for those of

them which remain to our day have been carefully read for the objects of the present essay, and quoted wherever they presented useful information or corroborative evidence in connexion with the subject of the truth of the religion. The only Christian writings, considered by any to belong to the first or second centuries, which have not been thought to require notice, are the Sibylline books, the legends of martyrs, and the uncanonical gospels, acts, and epistles. All these belong either to the second, or to the following century. The pieces last named were rejected as spurious by the primitive Christians, are never referred to by the early opponents of the religion, and contain violent contradictions both of sacred and profane history. They may, therefore, be safely dismissed from consideration.

71. Here the historical evidences of Christianity, strictly so called, end. It is scarcely necessary to observe that, with the exception of those passages in later works in which references are made to authorities of an earlier date, they are properly restricted to the

testimonies in the records of the first and second centuries. After the conclusion of those periods, not even secondary evidence of any importance could have been accessible. Hence, in the preceding pages, I have been anxious to limit the argument to the consideration of the works of the most ancient authors. It has also been conducted without the aid of the great and important evidences afforded by the facts recorded in the books of the New Testament, in order to adapt the reasoning to the minds of those who, however unfairly, refuse to accept any statements in the Scriptures even as corroborative testimony. But, in any discussion of this nature, it must ever be borne in mind that the object in view—to induce the sceptic to consider the religion worthy of attentive and candid investigation—is only to be attained by ignoring the best testimonies that can be adduced, which are unquestionably the gospels, those histories compiled by the eye-witnesses or immediate friends of the original witnesses of the facts recorded. Instead of receiving these accounts as entitled to credit,

it is necessary to argue from admissions made incidentally by the enemies of the religion to the truth of the principal statements therein contained, and from that by deduction and the establishment of a high degree of probability, to the authenticity of the evangelical narrative. In the foregoing observations, this has been attempted ; and whatever value may be placed on the arguments brought forward, it is at least anticipated that there will be no accusation of a want of candour. Whatever objections of importance are known to have been urged against the truth of Christianity are fairly stated, without the desire to conceal or explain away a single difficulty. The means of forming a correct judgment are, it is believed, before the reader. They are not produced with the assumption that the author can possibly have discovered new sources of information, that have escaped the notice of the many far more learned men who have treated on these subjects. The known literary treasury of the age of primitive Christianity has only been once again explored for materials bear-

ing testimony to the truth of the religion. It is sufficient if it be conceded that the more remarkable objects are gathered from the surface, exhibited in an intelligible form, unaccompanied on the part of the collector with any feeling of advocacy, and least of all with the attribution of wilful unfairness towards those who conscientiously differ from our conclusions. If the discussion were approached on both sides in a spirit of charity and forbearance, and with an anxious desire on the part of the sceptic to institute a diligent and careful examination into the credibility of the truth of the Christian faith, infidelity must inevitably disappear, or at least be restricted either to those who require a mathematical demonstration of the certainty of revelation, or to those who refuse to allow any weight of external historical evidence to overcome their self-imposed psychological objections to the creed. The confirmations of the truth of the religion are numerous and convincing. The difficulties attending its reception are few, are not insuperable, and may on any day be removed by the discovery



of contemporary records. Thus, at all events, the rejection of Christianity entails a responsibility no one can wisely incur without submitting it to the ordeal of a strict investigation; and certainly no dark clouds of doubt will overshadow the result of such an examination, if conducted by an enquirer acquainted with the recognised laws of historical evidence.

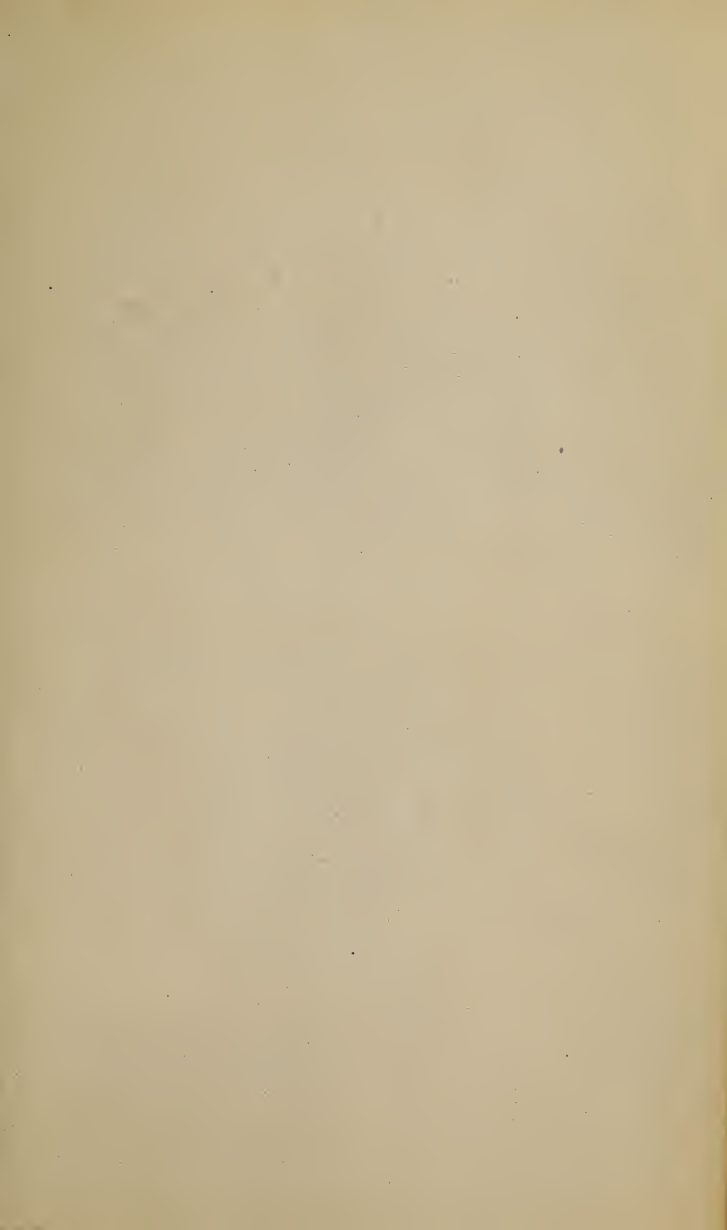


## NOTE.

A VERY able scholar has suggested to me that the passage in Tacitus, which mentions the temporary repression of Christianity, does not necessarily refer its cause to the Crucifixion of the Saviour, but rather, as is supposed by some critics of good authority, to the banishment of the Jews from Rome by Claudius. This latter event occurred at a very early period, certainly before A.D. 54, the year in which Claudius died, and if Tacitus really does allude to any event which occurred at Rome, the conjecture adds greatly to the force of the evidence in favour of the intensity of the spread of Christianity in its first progress. The words of Tacitus, however, which immediately follow the passage alluded to—*non modo per Judæam*,—appear to me to show distinctly that the writer intends to represent that the check given to the new faith, soon after the Crucifixion, was either owing absolutely to that event, or to some occur-

rence which took place *in Judea* within a few years afterwards. In whatever way the subject is viewed, the evidence in favour of Christianity remains at the same level. The various manuscripts of Tacitus offer no various readings, of any importance, in this highly valuable notice of the religion.

THE END.



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